OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CL… GAMES

retro GAMER

…STRAD | COMMODO… | …NDO | ATARI | S… | …O GEO | S… | COIN-O…

10 LAUNCH DISASTERS

INVESTIGATING THE INDUSTRY'S MOST SPECTACULAR VIDEOGAME FAILURES



ALSO INSIDE

ADVENTURE | CHRIS HUELSBECK | ICO
INTERCEPTOR SOFTWARE | F-ZERO
THE NEW ZEALAND STORY | KENJI ENO

INDIANA JONES

THE EXCITING STORIES BEHIND INDY'S GREATEST GAMING ADVENTURES

30 ESSENTIAL SHOOTERS

SPACE INVADERS, R-TYPE AND MORE. MINTER AND BRAYBROOK TALK SHOOT-'EM-UPS

SIMCITY

WILL WRIGHT LOOKS BACK AT HIS GENRE-DEFINING CITY BUILDER

LET'S GO MR DRIVER

HOW TAITO'S CHASE H.Q. SERIES HAS BEEN BURNING RUBBER FOR 25 YEARS

70S HOME COMPUTERS

THE MICROCOMPUTERS THAT STARTED A HOME REVOLUTION

ip IMAGINE PUBLISHING
DigitalEdition
GreatDigitalMags.com
ISSUE 115

THE RETROBATES FAVOURITE SHOOT-'EM-UP



DARRAN JONES

It more of a sub genre if you want to get technical, but *Robotron: 2084* remains one of the greatest twitch shooters of all time.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Panzer Dragoon
Favourite game of all time:
Strider/Robotron: 2084



STUART HUNT

R-Type is the best shooter of all time. It has all the ingredients of a classic: stunning visuals, nasty enemies, challenging gameplay and possibly the best power-up of all time.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently Playing:
Tomb Raider
Favourite game of all time:
Tomb Raider



PAUL DRURY

Obviously *Sheep In Space* but I also have deep affection for the *Galaxian* series. The original was a revelation and introduced 'chaining' to shoot-'em-ups and *Galaga '88* is a real high point of the genre.
Expertise:
Typing 'help' in text adventures
Currently playing:
BioShock Infinite
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



JASON KELK

I've always loved *Io* on the C64. It's a little short and a lot of people give up because it doesn't take prisoners but with some practise it can be beaten.
Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero
Currently playing:
Moon Patrol (Atari 8-bit)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



MARTYN CARROLL

Konami's *Scramble*. Loved it as a kid, and it's still fun to blaze through on a single credit. Superseded by the *Gradius* series, but still a great shooter.
Expertise:
Games that blipped and buzzed
Currently playing:
The Cave
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



PAUL DAVIES

Has to be *R-Type*. I played it on my mate's Master System and dreamed of owning the arcade version. It seemed to be the most amazing game possible – the force thing was so cool.
Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Halo 4
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



RICHARD BURTON

More forgiving than *Gradius* but also more fun due to the sheer madness of design of backgrounds and inhabitants, I'd always pick the kaleidoscopic world of *Parodius*.
Expertise:
Stuff and nonsense
Currently playing:
Technician Ted
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



CRAIG GRANNELL

Gridrunner for iOS —the perfect distillation of everything that's great about Jeff Minter shoot-'em-ups and also the genre in general. Bullet hell in a shoebox.
Expertise:
Games that don't require 37 fingers to play
Currently playing:
GoatUp 2
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



IAIN LEE

Io on the C64. Beautiful, overlooked and most of all addictive. It had that elusive 'one more go' factor that so many games miss.
Expertise:
Pretending to be an American on Xbox Live
Currently Playing:
Halo 4
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBCB version)

LOADING...



As many of you will no doubt know, I love shoot-'em-ups. It's my favourite genre, primarily because I feel it epitomises everything about videogames. It's a crying shame then that the genre is nowhere as popular as it used to be, and while it's doing quite well on certain formats like iOS, it remains a shadow of its former self.

I've recently gone back to my Sega Saturn (I feel it has some of the best shooters of any home system) and I was amazed at how playable games like *Batsugun*, *Radiant Silvergun* and *Soukyugurentai* still are. It's been something of a treat then to put together this month's essential shooters. We wanted to try and strike a balance between games that you need to play because they evolved the genre, and those that are fantastic games in their own right. Of course, it's entirely subjective, but if you don't agree with what we've chosen then by all means sign up at www.retrogamer.net/forum so that we can have a good natter about it.

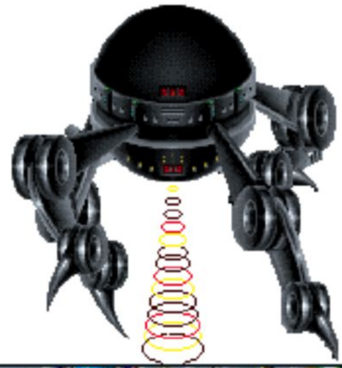
There's more to this month's issue than awesome shoot-'em-ups though; we've secured a rare interview with Will Wright about this month's cover game, spoken to Warren Robinett about the groundbreaking *Adventure* and documented the history of early home computers. There's plenty more great stuff, but I'll leave you to discover it yourself…



Enjoy the magazine,

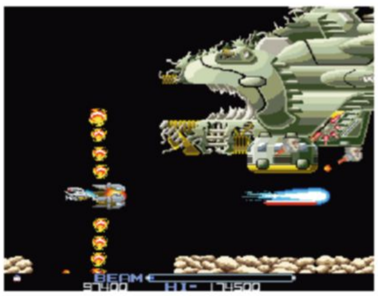


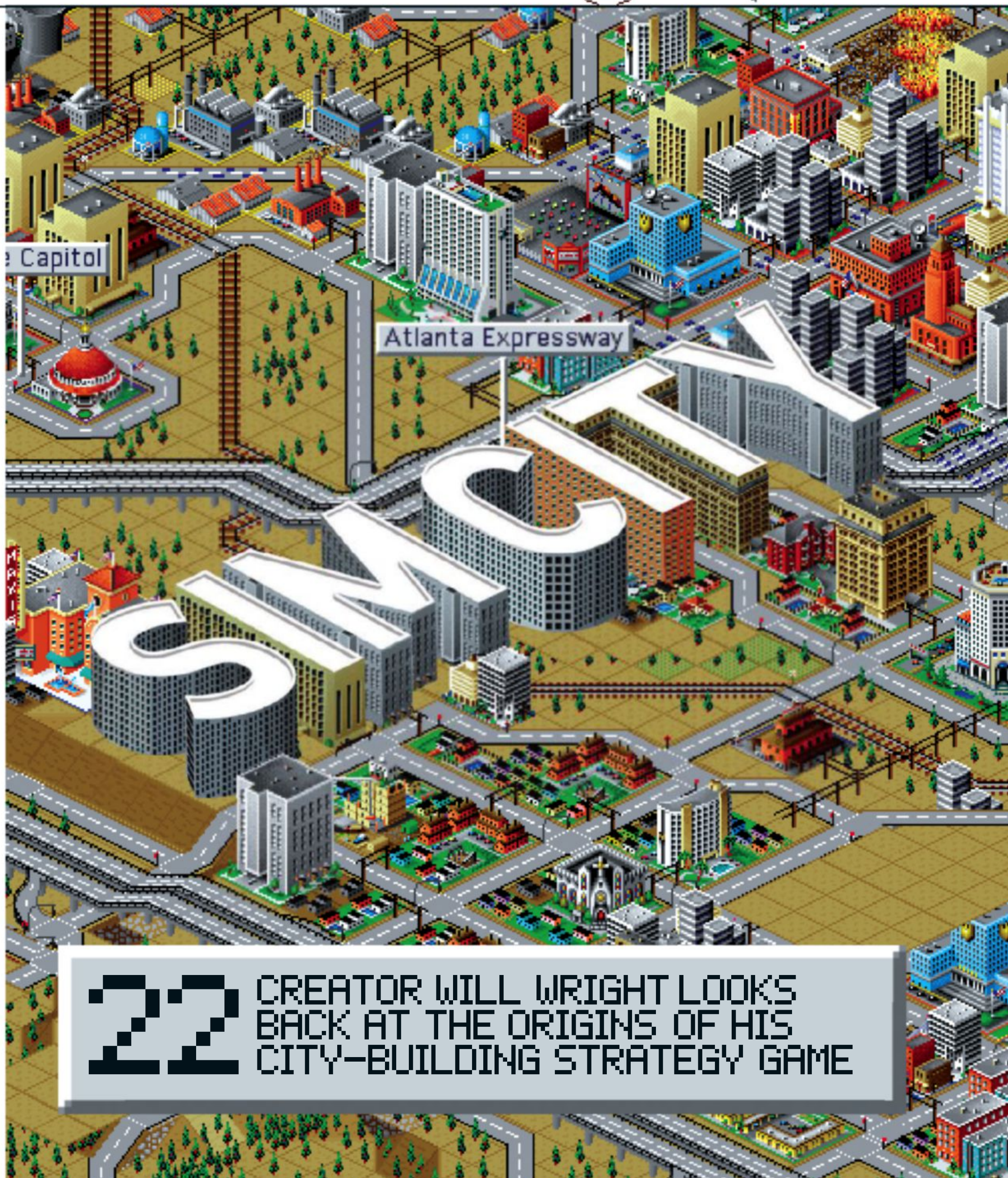
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>> Load 115 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED





RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month…





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"A sign of gaming's growing storytelling maturity"

Samuel Roberts



retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL





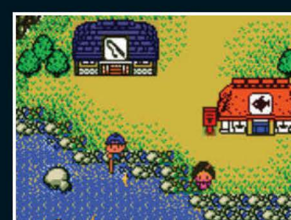


ESSENTIALS

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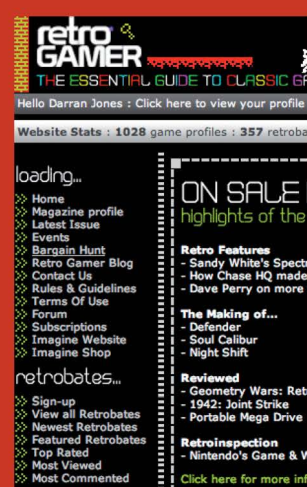






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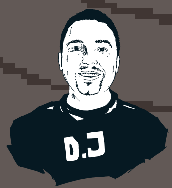
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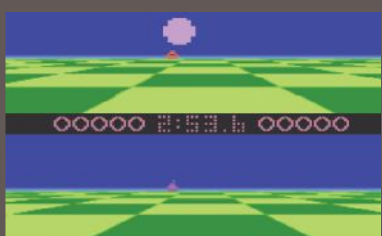
retroradar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> It's been an incredibly sad month, as we've lost the creators of some of the greatest point-and-click adventure games of all time. We also say a sad goodbye to Japanese developer Kenji Eno. A miserable month all round

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LUCAS Arts ®

1982 - 2013

EX STAFF DISCUSS THE CLOSURE OF THE LEGENDARY SOFTWARE HOUSE





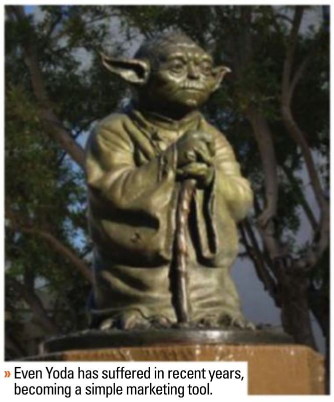


» [PC] *Sam & Max Hit The Road* was created by Steve Purcell who now works for Pixar.


» [PC] *Lucidity* was one of the last games LucasArts actually created in-house.



» [NES] *Maniac Mansion* was a huge hit and first game to use the SCUMM engine.


» Even Yoda has suffered in recent years, becoming a simple marketing tool.


» [PS2] A *Star Wars* game where you play as Boba Fett sounded amazing. It wasn't…


» Hopefully popular licences will be put on carbonite for other developers to thaw out.

When Disney acquired Lucasfilm and all its subsidiaries last October, in a deal worth $4.05 billion, the internet was quickly awash with rumour, speculation and excitement.

A new owner of the *Star Wars* franchise assured fans that there would be some activity happening within the cinematic universe, and pretty much every day since entertainment and movie websites have been filled with rumours and speculation about what this activity could entail.

Of course, there is often a more sobering side to large acquisitions such as this. When one company acquires another departmental restructuring and refocusing is often par for the course, and sadly, LucasArts – the videogame division of Lucasfilm – has become a casualty of the deal.

According to a report given by a representative of the company, the decision was been made to "shift LucasArts from an internal development to a licensing model, minimizing the company's risk while achieving a broader portfolio of quality *Star Wars* games."

"Disney will move development of future Star Wars videogames to its own studio"

What this means is Disney will move development of future *Star Wars* videogames to its own games studio Disney Interactive Studios, or outsource videogame projects to third-party studios. It also means job losses for many LucasArts staff, the cancellation of its current videogame projects, and the end of a studio which once dominated the adventure game market.

Formed in 1982, LucasArts (originally as Lucasfilm Games) was set up by George Lucas to allow the company to enter the burgeoning videogame space. In its early days it formed a close business relationship with Atari, and as a result LucasArt's games would often debut on Atari computers and consoles, while LucasArts biggest IPs, *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones*, were licensed to Atari for the coin-op market.

LucasArts earliest games, such as *Ballblazer*, *Rescue On Fractalus!* and *Koronis Rift*, showed the studio, in the early days, leveraging its games towards a *Star Wars* market – using angular space vehicles, aliens, robots and intergalactic settings. This all changed however with the release of *Maniac Mansion* in 1987, which established LucasArts as a capable studio of charming and humorous filmic graphic adventure games.

Maniac Mansion was developed by programmer Ron Gilbert and artist Gary Winnick, and though not the first adventure game to come from the studio (that honour goes to *Labyrinth* – the videogame tie-in to the 1986 movie starring David Bowie and Jennifer Connelly) *Maniac Mansion* did become the first to use popular SCUMM (Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion) engine – the verb based command interface that powered the lion's share of LucasArt's adventure games.

"It's sad, but I think I came to terms with them being gone when Disney bought them," says Ron when we contacted him to find out how he feels about the recent news, "so ▶



» [Amiga] *Monkey Island* remains one of LucasArts' finest ever moments.

Five Of The Best

>> LucasArts developed just under 70 games in-house; here are five of our favourites



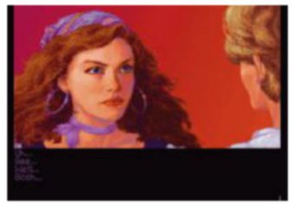
Rescue On Fractalus!
Released: 1984
This is one of LucasArts earliest games (when it was known as Lucasfilm Games) and it remains a belter. An early release for the Atari A8 and Atari 5200 it's a superb game that utilises fractal technology and has you searching the planet Fractalus for downed pilots. The sudden appearance of the alien Jaggies – that suddenly pop up when you think you've rescued a pilot – is also one of the earliest scariest moments in videogames.



Maniac Mansion
Released: 1987
This charming point-and-click adventure from the minds of Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick was one of LucasArts' biggest earliest hits, and took the genre in new and exciting directions. It's the first game to use LucasArts' SCUMM engine and told the story of a group of high school kids who explore a mysterious creepy mansion after one of the girlfriends is kidnapped by a creepy scientist. An excellent sequel, *Day Of The Tentacle* was released in 1993.



Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis
Released: 1992
This is quite simply the best *Indiana Jones* game ever made. It's another point-and-click adventure that utilises the SCUMM engine, but it does a fantastic job of capturing the essence of the popular films. It's different to other LucasArts adventure games of the time as it allows you to follow three distinct paths – Wits, Fists and Team – which drastically changes the difficulty of puzzles or amount of combat in the game.



The Secret Of Monkey Island
Released: 1990
Created by the LucasArts Triforce (Ron Gilbert, Tim Schafer and Dave Grossman) *Monkey Island* continued the strain of absurd comedy that had first appeared in *Maniac Mansion* and ran with it. The end result is easily one of LucasArts' finest moments, delivering memorable characters, funny one-liners and insult sword fighting to the gaming masses. It was followed by four sequels and was remade for iOS and download in 2009.



Star Wars: Dark Forces
Released: 1995
This excellent *Doom* clone did a superb job of fully immersing you in the *Star Wars* universe. Unlike many other first-person shooters of the time, *Dark Forces* had a deep engaging narrative that was told via key cutscenes. The gameplay itself is very similar to other shooters of the time, with protagonist Kyle Katarn taking out well known *Star Wars* enemies with a variety of different weapons (although the lightsabre wouldn't be introduced until the 1997 sequel).

» [PS2] One of its most interesting efforts was *Gladius*, a turn-based strategy game released in 2003.



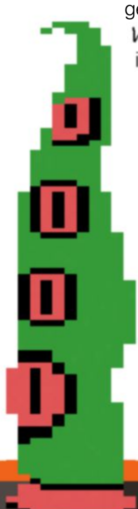
» [Xbox 360] *Force Unleashed II* was a disappointment for fans of the original game, clocking in at five hours.



▶ this wasn't a huge shock. George selling to Disney was a shock to me. I never though he'd sell Lucasfilm."

The success of *Maniac Mansion* set into effect the golden age of the studio, with similar point-and-click adventure games, such as *Maniac Mansion* sequel *Day Of The Tentacle*, *The Curse Of Monkey Island*, and *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*, cementing its lofty reputation within the adventure genre and making it one of the most popular and successful studios in PC gaming at the time.

Perhaps deciding game technology had reached a point where *Star Wars* games could really be done justice, the early Nineties also marks the time LucasArts began publishing its own *Star Wars* videogames, this resulting in popular *Star Wars* games such as *X-Wing*, *Rebel Assault* and the engaging *Doom*-alike *Dark Forces*.



> **"Its most recent in-house Star Wars output failed to achieve the same level of critical success"**

As we entered the new millennium a new *Star Wars* trilogy was big news. And unsurprisingly *Star Wars* games seemed to become the studio's main focus. Since then to the present generation of gaming, a raft of *Star Wars* games have seen release inside various game genres, from 2004 role playing game *Knights Of The Old Republic*, acclaimed *Star Wars* MMORPG, *Star Wars Galaxies*, to the popular *Battlefront* series and *Lego Star Wars* games by TT Games.

However its most recent in-house *Star Wars* output however – *The Force Unleashed* series and *Star Wars* MMORPG *Star Wars: The Old Republic* – failed to achieve the same level of critical success, leading many commentators to feel that the inventiveness and originality that the studio was famous for during its 'adventure game' heyday found itself getting lost under the *Star Wars* franchise.

One person who feels the magic hasn't been there for a while is Chuck Jordan, who co-wrote and co-programmed *The Curse Of Monkey Island* and went on to work on the *Sam & Max* series.

"I feel bad for all the people at the Presidio who lost their jobs, and I'm hoping they'll find work quickly. But for everything else, the LucasArts that made me such a fan I'd move 3000 miles away from home to work for them, hasn't existed for over a decade."

The closure of LucasArts will not affect the future of its IP. But for this once giant of PC gaming in the Nineties, this videogame adventure has finally come to a sad end. *



» [Next gen] This stunning looking *Uncharted* clone was apparently going to revolve around Boba Fett. It's since been cancelled by Disney along with *Star Wars: First Assault*.



The Collected Works

>> Here's every single game that LucasArts developed or co-developed in-house. How many have you played?

1984
- ❏ Ballblazer
- ❏ Rescue On Fractulas!

1985
- ❏ Koronis Rift
- ❏ The Eidolon

1986
- ❏ Labyrinth: The Computer Game
- ❏ PHM Pegasus

1987
- ❏ Maniac Mansion
- ❏ Strike Fleet

1988
- ❏ Battlehawks 1942
- ❏ Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders

1989
- ❏ Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade: The Graphic Adventure
- ❏ Their Finest Hour

1990
- ❏ Loom
- ❏ Night Shift
- ❏ The Secret Of Monkey Island

1992
- ❏ Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge
- ❏ Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis
- ❏ Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis The Action Game Check
- ❏ Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back
- ❏ The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles
- ❏ Super Star Wars

1993
- ❏ Day Of The Tentacle
- ❏ Sam & Max Hit The Road
- ❏ Star Wars: Rebel Assault
- ❏ Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back
- ❏ Zombies Ate My Neighbours

1994
- ❏ Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures
- ❏ Ghoul Patrol
- ❏ Super Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi

1995
- ❏ Big Sky Trooper
- ❏ The Dig
- ❏ Full Throttle
- ❏ Metal Warriors
- ❏ Star Wars: Dark Forces
- ❏ Star Wars: Rebel Assault II: The Hidden Empire

1996
- ❏ Afterlife
- ❏ Indiana Jones And His Desktop Adventures
- ❏ Mortimer And The Riddles Of The Medallion
- ❏ Star Wars: Shadow Of The Empire

1997
- ❏ The Curse Of Monkey Island
- ❏ Herc's Adventures
- ❏ Star Wars Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II
- ❏ Star Wars: Masters Of Teras Kasi
- ❏ Star Wars: Yoda Stories
- ❏ Outlaws

1998
- ❏ Grim Fandango
- ❏ Star Wars Jedi Knight: Mysteries Of The Sith
- ❏ Star Wars: Behind The Magic
- ❏ Star Wars: Rogue Squadron

1999
- ❏ Indiana Jones And The Infernal Machine
- ❏ Star Wars Episode 1 Racer

2000
- ❏ Escape From Monkey Island
- ❏ Star Wars: Racer Arcade
- ❏ Star Wars: Episode 1: Battle For Naboo
- ❏ Star Wars Episode 1: Jedi Power Battles
- ❏ Star Wars: Force Commander

2001
- ❏ Star Wars: Obi-Wan
- ❏ Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader
- ❏ Star Wars: Starfighter
- ❏ Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds

2002
- ❏ Star Wars: Bounty Hunter
- ❏ Star Wars: Jedi Starfighter

2003
- ❏ Gladius
- ❏ RTX Red Rock

2004
- ❏ Star Wars: Republic Commando

2008
- ❏ Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

2009
- ❏ Lucidity

2010
- ❏ Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II

THE RETRO DEBATE

>> Forum members share their thoughts on the recent news



VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

"Like a lot of old publishers, all that really remained of the original creative dev/publisher was the name. LucasArts hasn't really done anything good or creative for years apart from manage Star Wars IP (badly). Shame to see another once great name go down the pipe but its not going to have any real impact on todays industry for gamers, apart from the possible sale and/or licensing of some of their older IP that was all abandoned to concentrate on Star Wars in recent years." **FatTrucker**

"They were a great software company… up until about 15 years ago" **paranoid marvin**

"Really hope Disney lets people who care about the IPs develop new games for them, rather than doing an internal hack job on them" **IronMaidenRule**

"When I first read the news, it was saddening, they had produced and published some awesome games, but then the realisation dawned that I had not bought a decent game with their name on it in ages" **adippm82**

"LucasArts will forever have my thanks for giving me Rescue on Fractalus!, Zombies Ate My Neighbours, Star Wars: Battlefront and Day Of The Tentacle. I've had much in the way of enjoyment from that quartet of games. Sadly, LucasArts became minor players in more recent times and I won't miss them now they're gone" **The Beans**

"I never really was a fan of the company but I know there are tons of people out there that loved them for the games they put out in the past. I liken it to the way Square Enix is now. Yeah, the company was a lot better before they merged, putting out much better games, but for all their faults, I can't bring myself to despise them. I think the real bummer here is all those people that lost their jobs. 150+ layoffs in one fell swoop? Ouch" **Reglan**

retrocolumns

>> RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio…
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



Who Will Buy?



If you read my column last month, you will know that I gave away most of my retro game collection. I was moving house, I'm approaching 40 and I have two sons. I wouldn't call it a midlife crisis, but something had to shift. The games lost.

This is all well and good and for a while felt like a huge step towards, oh, I don't know – maturity? Responsibility? Becoming a MAN? I'm not sure – but these huge shifts in my life coupled with the death of my father in February made me feel all angsty. Clearing things out helped. For a while.

But now, I have the bug again. Sort of. It's not a fully formed bug – that gives it too much power. It's something gestating in my head and heart. An inkling that maybe I now would like to go back and indulge myself in a retro gaming fashion. I managed to survive a whole two months before getting itchy fingers. Like an alcoholic who decides to stop drinking for a short while, to prove to himself and everyone else that he doesn't actually have a problem with alcohol, I feel I have made my point and now need to neck shitloads of booze.

In my quiet times, when I am locked in my office 'working', I have spent significant energy having a cheeky look at eBay. Just, you know, to see. And it would appear there is a LOT to see. Some poor sod has put his entire videogame collection up there.

And this is a serious collection. It has everything in there – Jaguar, Dreamcast, Japanese Sega Saturn – it really is pretty awesome.

I'm curious as to why he has finally decided to allow this museum's worth of stuff out of his life. The only clue is the sentence in the listing 'It's time to let my pride and joy go.' And it appears that this mass of memories really is as important as any child he may or may not have. The photographs are beautiful, works of art in themselves. He has spent hours arranging his artefacts to look their best. This is no pile of stuff he's keen to shift ASAP, he has them posing as though they were, well, children and other members of his family.

I'm not going to bid on it, although I am very tempted. It started at 99p and very rapidly rose to its current price of £1,550 with 69 bids. There are three days to go. It will double that easily. The chap doesn't want to post, it's collection only. I would find it too sad to go to his home, and watch as he closed the door for the last time on what has been his life for so long. Imagine for a second what would be going through this gentle soul's mind as he slunk back into his kitchen to make a cup of tea after saying goodbye to all of that booty. It's heartbreaking and I really don't think I could be party to that.









» Wanting to prove that he didn't only work on horror games, Eno produced the humorous *Oyaji Hunter Mahjong* for 3DO.

KENJI ENO: UNTAMED SPIRIT

ANOTHER GAMING LEGEND IS LOST

"You have a short life; you're going to die someday. I don't want to waste my time looking back on something I did in the past. Life is short! There's no time to look back!" Kenji Eno told 1UP in 2008. On 20 February 2013 he passed away, aged 42, due to a heart attack brought on by hypertension and, as some believe, the clove cigarettes he smoked.

By the time you read this there will surely have been many stories written about this Japanese icon. But the best writings are actually a few years old: an exhaustive ten page interview by 1UP titled Japan's Wayward Son, breaking eight years of silence, and a lengthy feature on Hardcore Gaming 101. The innumerable words written about Kenji Eno describe him as an eccentric, a maverick, and a self-styled bad boy. Few articles, however, convey the sheer magnitude and productive output of the man, who was involved in so much more than just games. Arguably he's better known in some circles for his music than his games.

It's difficult not to like someone so daring and confident in their own vision: throughout his life Eno broke rules, took risks and burned bridges, but he always did things his way and he always managed to make it out in one piece. When Eno entered the games industry through his third job, it was almost by accident. Working on a variety of games, some unreleased, Eno left the industry, returning years later and making a name for himself with his second independent company, WARP. He sided with 3DO, supporting them with avant-garde titles, including *Trip'D*. We asked Trip Hawkins about this: "I have heard that that game was named after me. I did not know Kenji well enough to say anything other than I have great feelings of sorrow for his departure, a sad and premature loss."

Eno's first major success was the horror adventure game *D*. Worried that a scene involving mother/daughter cannibalism would be censored, he submitted a version without it for approval, then intentionally missed the deadline for the master disc, delivering it in person but replacing the clean disc with an uncensored version.

Later he publicly humiliated Sony by switching allegiance to Sega at a crowded press event. The project that came after was *Enemy Zero,* a survival horror intentionally designed to be almost impossible to play. For the music he wanted famed composer Michael Nyman (*The Piano*), so Eno used guerrilla tactics and held Nyman captive in a hotel room for six hours, until an agreement was reached. After this came *Real Sound* for the Saturn, a game without any graphics and intended for the blind.

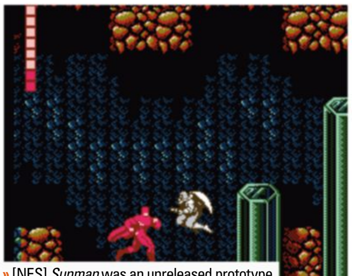
Despite his larger than life persona, much of Eno's work will probably be unknown in the UK. Indeed, his biggest game to have an English release, *D2* on Dreamcast, only came out in America. After *D2,* Eno was involved in restaurants, radio, new mobile phone technologies, and a lot of music production (much of his work is on Youtube). Eno also embraced social media. On Twitter he had nearly 20,000 followers and made 51,041 tweets. His last was on 17 February 17.

Three days later the world lost a great auteur. He left behind his wife and children.



» Kenji Eno, about to program a CMode vending machine.

Special thanks to Hardcore Gaming 101, Bruno de Figueiredo, Justin Hall of www.links.net, and Yakumo of Segagagadomain, for assistance and imagery.



» [NES] *Sunman* was an unreleased prototype based on a cancelled *Superman* game.

retro columns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

Getting To The Good Stuff

I almost walked out of *Hellraiser II* in 1988. After about 20 minutes, I'd decided it was a bit crap. Glad I stayed another hour or so though because the stuff at the end was pretty great. Super NES fans faced a similar dilemma with *Castlevania IV* a few years later, probably the most disappointing opening hour or so of a game ever. Simon walked like he was drenched in superglue and needed the toilet, his whip looked like a worm and enemies shuffled in a lifeless conga.

But wait! After the terrible, boring beginning *Castlevania IV* became glorious! Simon upgraded his whip to a chain that smashed skeletal horses complete with riders, sending bones flying everywhere. He encountered rooms that span around him, and leapt between colossal chandeliers. To some of the best ever music on 16-bit consoles, Simon's epic fourth quest became legendary.

I learned that, in videogames, good things will surely come to those who wait. Fingers crossed. Perhaps my greatest reward for patience was *Final Fantasy VII*. Guys on other magazines in the office had given up on this "boring, turn-based bollocks" after a few hours, even though it was agreed the CG intro was cool and the visuals were uniquely attractive. But after so much fuss made about *FFVII* – its treacherous abandonment of Nintendo, for starters – I needed to know what was so special. I don't need to tell **RG** readers why *FFVII* is worth anyone's while. I would like to share again, however, that 'Holy shit!' moment the first time Ifrit bursts from the ground. And Aerith...

Lately the blockbusters are testing our time-honoured gamer gumption to the limit, making desperate men and women of us all. I almost reached out with both hands to grab the collar of a workmate the other day, begging him to tell me that *Resident Evil 6* becomes good after 20 hours – because this is what I had heard. My friend pressed his lips together and slowly shook his head. So, I guess I'll never experience *Resident Evil 6* nirvana because it's too traumatic a trial to face.

Assassin's Creed III, mind you, I've dedicated over 70 hours to absorb, deliriously plodding up a snowy mountain-side after an elk at 4am (actual time, GMT) because I'd grown to admire Connor's stoic personality after around 20 hours, and I had a good enough reason from much earlier on to wish for his revenge. I'm not sure if I enjoyed *Assassin's Creed III* though. After 70 hours. Seven, zero – seventy.

Feeling mentally upgraded by this experience (if irreparably broken too) I've gone back to *Final Fantasy XIII*, which, as 'Zen monk' gamers told me, gets good after 30 hours. I'd say this is accurate. I still think it's true that some of us old timers remain attracted to games because, for many other people, they are hard to like. Which is why enduring hours of apparent nonsense in expectation of miraculous discovery remains part of the fun for me.

I feel like Drake or Lara going that extra mile for a priceless treasure, and possibly a deeper level of artistic understanding and appreciation. Weird shit is what keeps games cool; even *Call Of Duty* is required to keep consoles in a good state of health.



25 April – 23 May

retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present



25 April 1986
■ *Max Headroom* was published by Quicksilva and released on Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum.



26 April 2013
■ Deep Silver is due to release the zombie-infested action RPG *Dead Island: Riptide* on PC, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.



28 April 1980
■ Nintendo released *Ball*, the first in what would prove to be a lucrative series of handheld Game & Watch games.

28 April 2004
■ The superhero based MMORPG, *City Of Heroes*, is launched on Windows and Mac formats.



29 April 2008
■ Rockstar Games' open world action adventure, *Grand Theft Auto IV*, made its debut on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and Wii.





30 April 1997
■ LucasArts released *Star Wars: X-Wing Vs TIE Fighter* on PC.



3 May 2002
■ Electronic Arts released *SSX Tricky* on the GameCube across Europe.



4 May 1993
■ Interplay's co-operative platform puzzler *The Lost Vikings* was released on the Sega Mega Drive.



5 May 1986
■ Just say Kwah! *Redhawk* by Melbourne House was released on the Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum.



9 May 1986
■ Commodore's new Amiga home computer made its official UK debut at the Commodore Show.



10 May 1982
■ *Yars' Revenge* was released on the Atari 2600. It was programmed by Howard Scott Warshaw, the man behind *E.T. – The Extra Terrestrial*.



13 May 1994
■ Mario's rival Wario starred in his own game, *Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3*, which was released on the Game Boy.



14 May 2001
■ Sega and Acclaim collaborated to bring us *Crazy Taxi* on the PlayStation 2.



14 May 2004
■ Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* arrived on Xbox in the UK.



15 May 2003
■ Classic FPS action arrived on the Xbox with id Software's *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*.



17 May 2009
■ SCEJ's sandbox game *Minecraft* was publicly released on PC as a developmental alpha version.



19 May 1990
New out for the Sega Mega Drive was the side-scrolling beat-'em-up *DJ Boy*.



20 May 1983
■ Vector graphics and Eighties console styling came together perfectly to bring us the wonderful Vectrex, launched by MB Games.



21 May 1984
■ At a press conference, Atari announced the new Atari 7800 while revealing the Atari 5200 was to be discontinued.



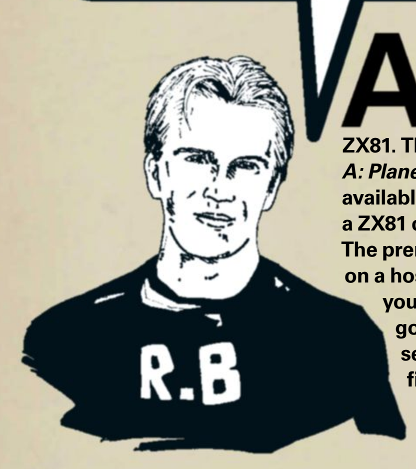
23 May 2013
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 1981

AUGUST 1981 – Artic adventures begin, Astro Wars makes a grand entrance, from little Acorns mighty Protons grow, Popeye pops up, Asteroids are coming and Moon Cresta becomes not very Super. Richard Burton likes Um Bongo…



Artic Computing announced the first of a series of text adventures it would be releasing on the ZX80 and ZX81. The first title would be *Adventure A: Planet Of Death* and would be available for the ZX80 immediately with a ZX81 conversion arriving soon after. The premise was that you had crashed on a hostile alien planet, must locate your captured spaceship and make good your escape. The *Adventure* series went on to become a fixture on the Sinclair machines, with further releases over the next four years concluding with *Adventure H: Robin Hood* on the Spectrum.



» [Game And Watch] Popeye catches food while avoiding Bluto. Simplistic yet fun gaming from Nintendo.

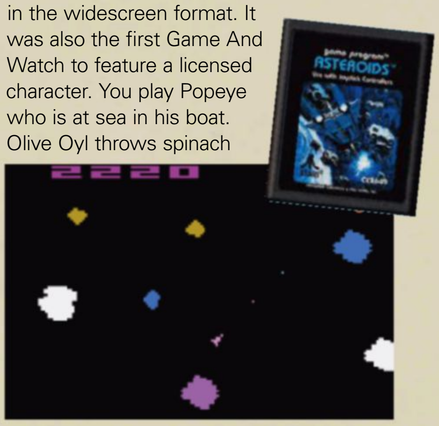
Released this month was a tabletop game that would become something of an icon and would, for many kids, be their first taste of videogaming; Grandstand's *Astro Wars*. It was a typical shoot-'em-up laced with bright vacuum fluorescent graphics and eardrum-bursting sound effects. The lens-magnified playing area would eventually make your eyeballs feel like they had been scrubbed with a Brillo Pad after a couple of hours play, such was the intensity of brightness and colour, assuming the batteries lasted that long. Also, prolonged use of the small metallic joystick controller would give you a severe case of numb thumb but that was all part of the majesty of electronic tabletop gaming. No pain, no game.

Astro Wars was essentially a *Galaxian* clone and although the gameplay was repetitive it still managed to offer four distinct phases which looped until you completed the game with the maximum 10000 points. In phase one, shoot the marauding alien ships. Phase two added the swooping kamikaze fighters. Phase three saw you dodging a hailstorm of missiles while you shoot the command ships and, lastly, phase four introduced the frustratingly irksome ship docking manoeuvre in which you attempted to reunite both parts of your ship, all against the clock.

There were rumblings in the press that Acorn Computers had pencilled in a pre-Christmas release date for its new computer, the BBC Micro. The new machine was originally nicknamed the Proton during development and the prototype was built in a week in response to the British Broadcasting Corporation requesting tenders for a new computer and peripherals for their forthcoming BBC Computer Literacy Project. This Government-led scheme would eventually see BBC Micro computers placed in 80 per cent of schools and adopted as the educational computer of choice throughout the UK.

It would also feature regularly in BBC television computing programmes as well as being used for special effects purposes in other shows. We would get an early look at its graphical capabilities with the BBC Micro creating the graphics for the memorable final task, the Vortex, in the second series of the children's television show *The Adventure Game* which aired early November 1981. Doogy rev!

Nintendo continued its production line of Game And Watch pocket games with the eleventh title in the series and third in the widescreen format. It was also the first Game And Watch to feature a licensed character. You play Popeye who is at sea in his boat. Olive Oyl throws spinach



» [Atari 2600] Despite blocky graphics and pink asteroids, the 2600 conversion played rather well.

CHARTS

AUGUST 1981

ARCADE



1 Donkey Kong (Nintendo)
2 Pac-Man (Namco)
3 Missile Command (Atari)
4 Centipede (Atari)
5 Phoenix (Centuri)

ATARI 2600



1 Missile Command (Atari)
2 Warlords (Atari)
3 Dragster (Activision)
4 Pele's Soccer (Atari)
5 Space Invaders (Atari)



ACORN ATOM

1 Fruit Machine (Bug-Byte)
2 Invader Force (Micro Power)
3 Atom Invaders (Bug-Byte)
4 Demon Dungeon (Micro Power)
5 Backgammon (Bug Byte)

MUSIC

1 Green Door (Shakin' Stevens)
2 Hooked On Classics (Royal Philharmonic Orchestra)
3 The Model/Computer Love (Kraftwerk)
4 Japanese Boy (Aneka)
5 Tainted Love (Soft Cell)



cans and other food at him which he must catch while Bluto tries to punch him in the head or hit him with a hammer. Nice chap. Drop a food item or get bludgeoned by Bluto and you lose a life. Although *Popeye* was not a big hit for Nintendo, it did release two further *Popeye* titles; a tabletop game and another Game And Watch title for the Panorama series both of which appeared two years later.

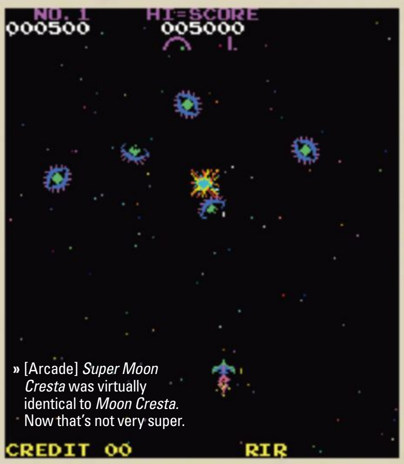
New to arcades this month was *Super Moon Cresta*. Released by Gremlin Industries under licence from Nichibitsu, it was the sequel to the original *Moon Cresta*, which was released mid-1980. It was a 2D shoot-'em-up which saw you battle through levels of alien ships before attempting to dock with the next part of your spaceship. While this would give you extra fire power it would also make you a bigger target for your foes.

Another further expansion of your ship and firepower capabilities would hopefully take you through to the end stages where, if completed, the game would loop back



» [BBC Micro] The computer most found in UK schools was also mostly used for playing *Frak* rather than educational purposes…

to the beginning. It was pleasant enough in terms of graphics and gameplay but offered little in originality… and there was the problem, the difference between the two games was negligible. They were identical in every way except the alien hoards return fire and the game was faster. It was barely a new game at all



» [Arcade] *Super Moon Cresta* was virtually identical to *Moon Cresta*. Now that's not very super.

With Christmas looming, Atari took the opportunity to repackage its Atari 400 computer and introduced four new starter kits for newcomers to Atari computing. The four new packages were The Entertainer, which included two games and two joysticks, The Programmer, which included a BASIC cartridge and book, The Educator, which had the BASIC cartridge and educational software and finally The Communicator, which, of the four packages, was by far the most interesting. It included an Atari acoustic modem, interface module and Telelink software cartridge to get you browsing online networks such as Compuserve.

There was also good news for owners of Atari's wood-grained 2600 console with news that Atari's humungous 1979 arcade hit *Asteroids* was set for release next month. While the original *Asteroids* arcade game utilised vector line graphics, the 2600 graphics were not too dissimilar in resolution to Lego bricks. It would be interesting to see if Atari could pull off a favourable version of such a fan favourite game. In typical Atari style it would come with numerous variations, 66 in total, and all for just £34.

AUGUST 1981 NEWS



1 August saw the launch of Music Television (MTV), an American cable television music channel that played videos 24 hours a day. The first video to air on MTV was the 1979 hit for The Buggles, the aptly named *Video Killed The Radio Star*.

12 August saw the first IBM PC launched. Model 5150 with an Intel 8088 processor landed in the shops at a base price of $1565.

24 August saw the sentencing of Mark David Chapman, the man who murdered John Lennon in New York on 8 December 1980. He was given a sentence of 20 years to life and still remains in prison today after being refused parole on seven occasions.

26 August saw NASA's Voyager 2 spacecraft make its closest fly-by of the planet Saturn at a distance of just 63,000 miles. A day later Voyager 2 flew by Titan, the largest of Saturn's moons, taking several detailed pictures in the process.

August also saw several classic music albums released; *Dead Ringer* by Meatloaf was the follow-up to his hit album *Bat Out Of Hell*. The biggest hit from that album was *Dead Ringer For Love* sung by Mr Loaf and singer/actress Cher. Also released in August was Debbie Harry's first solo album *Koo Koo*. It didn't do particularly well with none of its singles charting in the Top 20 but the album became well known for the H.R. Giger designed sleeve artwork featuring Debbie Harry's face impaled with metal skewers.

THIS MONTH IN…

YOUR COMPUTER



YC ran an interview with Clive Sinclair taking a retrospective look at his career in electronics and how he built up his empire. He also spoke about the BBC Literacy Scheme which Acorn Computers managed to win despite Sinclair being overly confident of success. He was not a happy fella.



ATARI CONNECTION



Atari Connection looked at education and programming and interviewed teenager Joel Gluck who had entered an Atari sponsored games programming competition in which he came second. Joel later helped with level design in Atari's *Dandy*, an early inspiration for their 1985 dungeon crawler hit *Gauntlet*.



ATARI OWNERS CLUB BULLETIN



Newly released in the UK were the Atari 400 and 800 computers. Priced at £345 and £645 respectively, they were available under an exclusive franchise between Atari and Ingersoll Electronics. Of course, the Atari 400/800 weren't new at all as they had been available in the USA for over two years.



BACK TO THE NINETIES

CHARTS



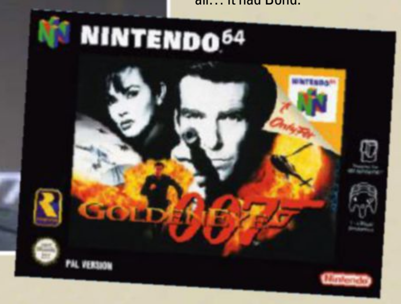
FEBRUARY 1996

SNES



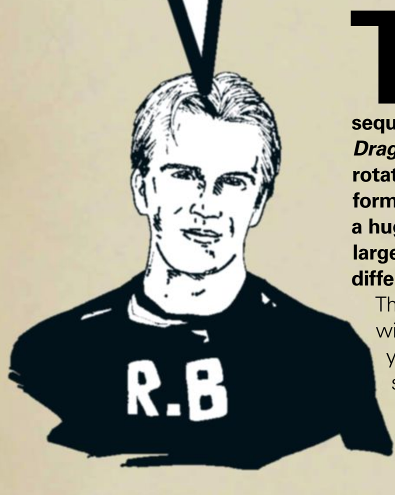
1. FIFA Soccer 96 (EA)
2. Killer Instinct (Nintendo)
3. Mickey Mania (Sony Imagesoft)
4. Mortal Kombat 3 (Acclaim)
5. International Superstar Soccer Deluxe (Konami)

» [N64] Rare's *GoldenEye* had a perfectly weighted difficulty system, terrific multiplayer options and great graphics/sound but most all… it had Bond.



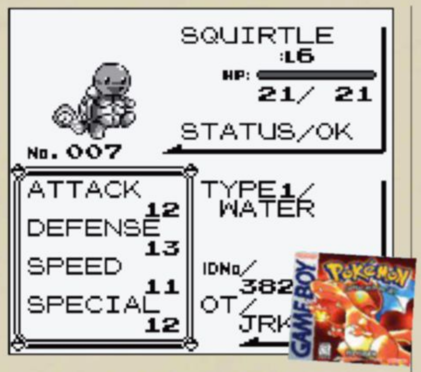
THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 1996

FEBRUARY 1996 – Panzer Dragoon returns, Rise 2: Resurrection shouldn't have, Magic Carpet flies in, Game Boy is revitalised by Pocket Monsters. Sonic gets Saturnised while GoldenEye is almost here. Richard Burton likes it shaken but not stirred…



There was good news from Sega with everyone's favourite dragon-based rail shooter, *Panzer Dragoon*, set for a sequel, or rather a prequel… *Panzer Dragoon II: Zwei* continued with the full rotational 3D graphics and rail shooter formula that made the original such a huge hit. The levels had been made larger and you could also take several different routes through them.

The original dragon had been replaced with a freshly hatched beast which you keep as a pet but later grows into something a lot more useful. You play Lundi who, along with his pet dragon Lagi, must track down the Shelcoof, a large weapon-laden airship which destroyed Lundi's village. The game would prove to be excellent with gameplay and graphical improvements making for a much more polished game. A solid soundtrack added to the unique atmosphere that the game set. Sadly it was only available on the Sega Saturn…



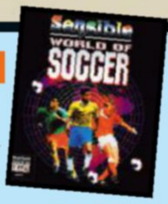
» [Game Boy] *Pokémon* – games, cards, toys, stickers, underpants, cartoons… it was everywhere.

If the merest mention of *Rise Of The Robots* sets your blood boiling and wallet recoiling in horror at the abject and frankly criminal fighting game from Mirage then the news that a sequel was nearing development completion would surely have you biting your fist in rage. Mirage once again headed the development and in what could be considered a wise move, decided to listen to criticism and gamers regarding the botched first game. So, with knowledge in hand and a notebook full of ideas, *Rise 2: Resurrection* was underway.

Unforgivably, the lessons learnt were largely ignored for the sequel. Once again the graphics were crisply defined yet sluggish, the gameplay was faster than previous but still painfully awkward to watch and even the addition of hidden moves, termination moves and animated background couldn't save *Rise 2* from plunging into the abyss of videogames bargain binsville. Saturn, PC and PlayStation owners all avoided it like the plague.

Bullfrog Production's flying/first-person-shooter game, *Magic Carpet*, was due to be converted for the Sega Saturn and PlayStation. As the name suggests, you fly a magic carpet across a variety of beautiful landscapes while taking out fellow wizards and monsters with well directed spell casting from a book of 24 spells. Your aim on each of the 50 levels is to collect the required amount of golden orbs of manna for progression to the next. The music and sound in *Magic Carpet* were outstanding with distinctive music matched with some delightfully subtle sound effects and the graphics, particularly the magic carpet, moved with fluidity and gracefulness.

AMIGA	PC	MUSIC
1 Sensible World Of Soccer (Virgin)	**1** Destruction Derby (Sony)	**1** Spaceman (Babylon Zoo)
2 Worms (Ocean)	**2** FIFA Soccer 96 (Electronic Arts)	**2** Anything (3T)
3 Super Skidmarks (Guildhall Leisure)	**3** Worms (Ocean)	**3** Lifted (Lighthouse Family)
4 Alien Breed 3D (Ocean)	**4** Hexen (GT Interactive)	**4** I Got 5 On It (Luniz)
5 Player Manager 2 (Virgin)	**5** Command And Conquer (Virgin Interactive)	**5** One Of Us (Joan Osborne)







Nintendo's Game Boy handheld was approaching its seventh birthday and it had been mooted in certain quarters that it was coming to the end of its natural life with many of its games residing in the cheapo section of videogame shops. However, things were about to change. Released this month in Japan was a pair of games entitled *Pocket Monsters Red* and *Green* which would later be reprogrammed and renamed *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* for the rest of the world. In *Pocket Monsters* there were different aims to the game; you could either battle the Gym Leaders who preside over various regions and become the champion or you could attempt to collect all 151 Pokémon and complete your in-game encyclopaedia of Pokémon, the Pokédex. This is where the unique selling point of the two games came into its own.

By connecting two Game Boys playing both *Red* and *Green* games with a Game Link cable, you could do battle, capture or trade your monsters and to complete your Pokédex it was absolutely necessary to indulge in a spot of trading. Moreover, each game also had an exclusive Pokémon and many of the existing monsters wouldn't evolve into new Pokémon, which also required collecting, unless they were traded. "Gotta Catch Them All" was the tagline for the games and it soon became an obsession for gamers to do just that.

Pokémon took over the world. The once ailing Game Boy was hot property once again with *Pokémon* becoming a global phenomenon which spawned a multi-billion dollar franchise for Nintendo. The original *Red* and *Blue* games set the standard for future releases and with eventual total worldwide sales of over 23 million units just for those two titles, it was hard to see when the *Pokémon* craze would die out. A bit of gaming innovation, a playable RPG game featuring cutesy monsters and the world could be your oyster… assuming it doesn't evolve into Clamperl…

With Nintendo's N64 due out in Japan in just four months, information about the first wave of games under development became known. Preview shots of some of these games looked marvellous with *Shadows Of The Empire* (LucasArts), *Pilotwings*, *Mario Kart 64*, *Mario 64* and *Legend Of Zelda* (all Nintendo) and a rather interesting game based on the newest James Bond movie *GoldenEye*.

Developed by Rare, *GoldenEye* promised to be something particularly special for a first-person shooter. It would have texture-mapped characters and a concentrated effort was made to replicate the atmosphere of the movie. Rare succeeded in recreating this with excellent graphics, engrossing level designs and sound effects straight from the movie. *GoldenEye* would come to be regarded as one of the best games ever released on the N64.

Fans of *Sonic The Hedgehog* were rejoicing with the news that Sega were developing a Sonic game for the Saturn. It would eventually appear as *3D Sonic Blast*; more isometric perspective than actual 3D, and would be slower paced game than previous incarnations. Sega also revealed plans for a new *Sonic* arcade game but rather than the usual platform/collecting rings affair, *Sonic The Fighters* (aka *Sonic Championship* in the USA) would be a beat-'em-up with 3D polygon graphics. Hmmm.



» [Sega Saturn] Bullfrog's *Magic Carpet* had some absolutely lovely graphics.



» [PlayStation] *Rise 2* wasn't a let down like *Rise Of The Robots*. It was just pants.

FEBRUARY 1996 NEWS

5 February saw the first genetically modified food go on sale in UK supermarkets. Nicknamed Frankenstein foods, the first product to go on sale was tomato puree which had been produced from tomatoes which had their rotting gene removed. Three years later supermarkets were forced to remove all GM purees after a study claimed that the internal organs of rats fed GM foods had been genetically altered. Anti-GM food protests and a blanket ban on the planting of GM foods across Europe were put in place in 2005.

10 February saw Deep Blue, a chess playing computer developed by IBM, take on and beat reigning chess world champion and grandmaster Garry Kasparov. Although Deep Blue lost the series of six games with three defeats and two drawn matches, the win marked a landmark for computing and IBM. IBM later upgraded the computer, renaming it Deeper Blue and a year later a new six match series was played against Kasparov. Deeper Blue won the series by defeating Moody Red in the sixth and final game.

24 February saw the demise of three animated anthropomorphic mice Modo, Throttle and Vinnie, when the cartoon series *Biker Mice From Mars* was cancelled after three series. It ran for two and a half years over 65 episodes.

It was revived again in 2006 with a new 28 episode series, but it just wasn't the *Biker Mice* we liked so much.



THIS MONTH IN…

COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



With the Japanese N64 launch four months away *C&VG* previewed some of the games under development, with *Mario 64* standing out as something to get excited about. Gameplay was reportedly astounding with Nintendo stating it would be "the greatest videogame in history". No pressure, then.



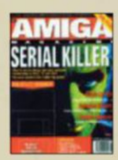
SUPER PLAY



Super Play had something of a rarity, a feature about Rare and an interview with its production manager Simon Farmer. It took a look at its beginnings as Ultimate, progressing to dealings with Nintendo and up to date with news of Rare's latest game, *Donkey Kong Country 2*.



CU AMIGA



Virtual IO Systems had its Virtual i-Glasses reviewed this month and it wasn't particularly favourable. Reviewers were critical of the build quality, the uncomfortable feel and that there were no games released for Amiga that made use of the glasses 3D mode. A bargain at just £586…



retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

Dragon Crystal

THE RRPG: RANDOM ROLE-PLAYING GAME

#61



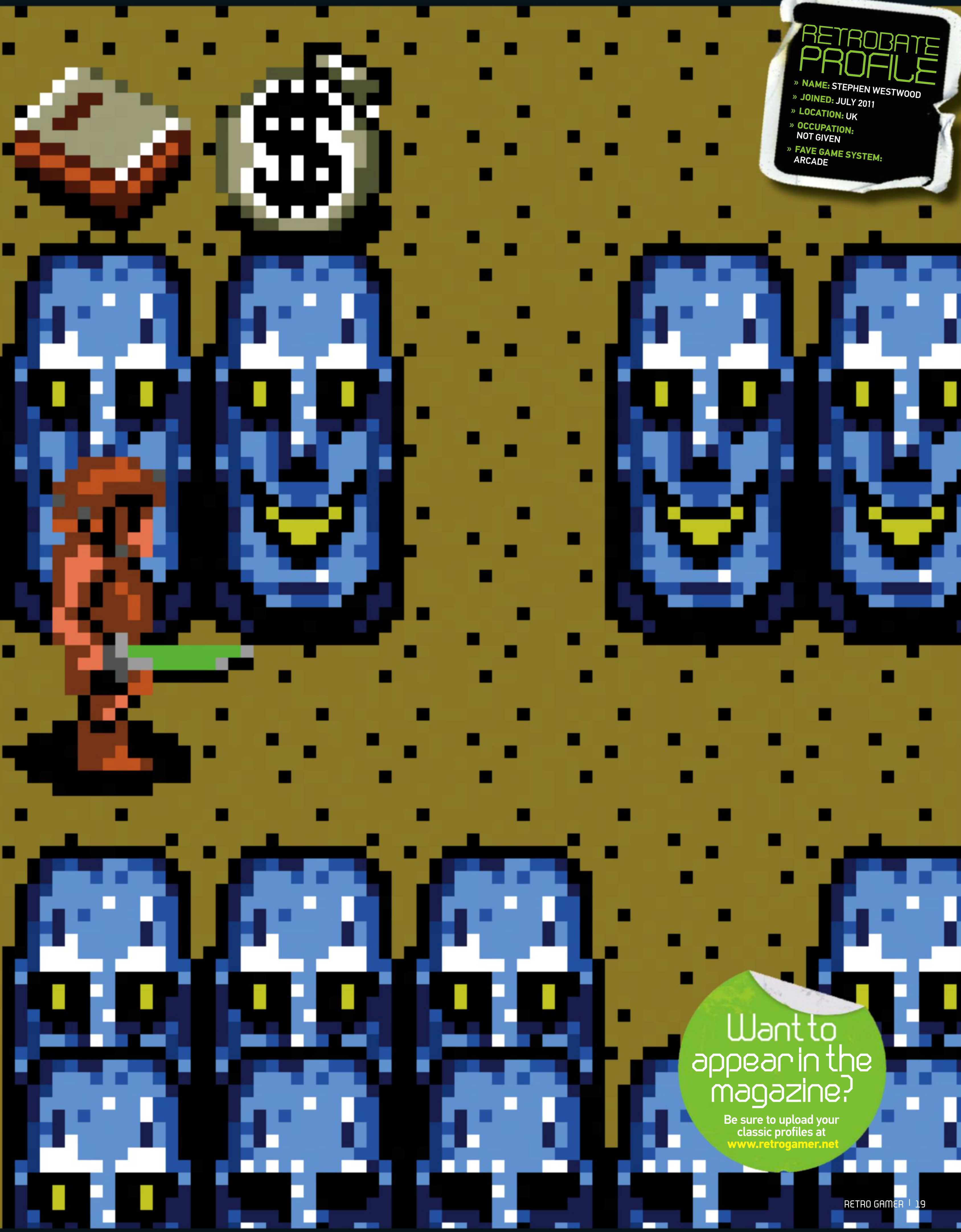
» GAME GEAR
» SEGA
» 1990

Ordinarily, role-playing games, like *Zelda,* allow you to roam the countryside and dungeons, killing monsters, finding objects and solving puzzles. You get a top-down or slightly-to-the-side view of your world and the action occurs in real time with a little arcade-style monster-bashing. You save the princess and it's all over. I'd rather the game went on and on and/or was a little different the next time I played it, a new world to explore each time… which brings me to *Dragon Crystal.*

This SMS and Game Gear RPG looks like a *Zelda* style game, but it is much simpler and extremely easy to play. It may not be all that involved, it may not take huge skill or have an epic storyline, but its strength is in randomisation. The 30 mazes which reveal themselves to you as you push through the 'fog' and' foliage' in 'Rogue' style are always different and place the objects, monsters and exits to the next world in random positions. A new world every time, that's familiar but also new.

One button was needed to check your inventory where you decide to equip new weapons and armour or use and drop magical objects. Magic rods, scrolls, potions and rings are listed only by their colour until you use one and then find out what it does. This, of course, is also different every time. So will the silver potion make you feel better or decidedly dodgy? It's a risk you take, and fighting monsters (by walking into them) is risky too. If you are losing hit points and are going to die you have to run away so that your character eats his food reserves and gets stronger. That's about it for gameplay. During the adventure your character learns what the things do, gets a dragon buddy, listens to the nice music and hears that cool 'ting' as a sword thrust is blocked. He then gets killed by a blood toad.

But if you do decide to go again, rest assured, your little adventurer will have forgotten everything and the world will be one that is fresh and exciting again. Now THAT is an adventure!



RETROBATE PROFILE

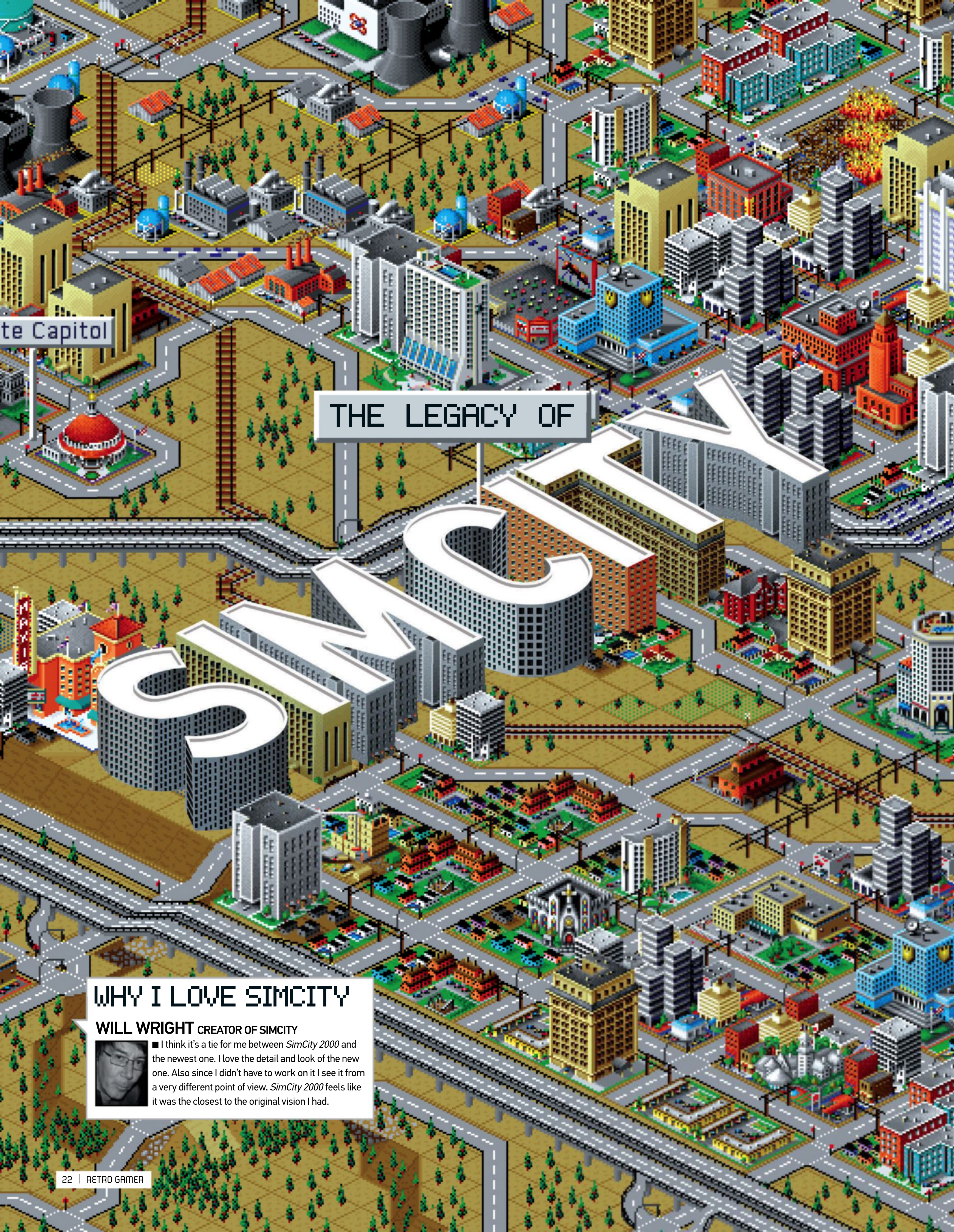
» **NAME:** STEPHEN WESTWOOD
» **JOINED:** JULY 2011
» **LOCATION:** UK
» **OCCUPATION:** NOT GIVEN
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** ARCADE

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12
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Bonds enhance abilities and allow love to grow!
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INCLUDES PRE-INSTALLED
FIRE EMBLEM Awakening



THE LEGACY OF SIMCITY

WHY I LOVE SIMCITY

WILL WRIGHT CREATOR OF SIMCITY

■ I think it's a tie for me between *SimCity 2000* and the newest one. I love the detail and look of the new one. Also since I didn't have to work on it I see it from a very different point of view. *SimCity 2000* feels like it was the closest to the original vision I had.



LIKE THE SPRAWLING METROPOLISES THE GAME CAN PRODUCE, SIMCITY CONTINUES TO GROW AND EXPAND WITH EACH AND EVERY ITERATION. ADAM BARNES SPEAKS TO WILL WRIGHT ABOUT CRAFTING A NEW GENRE AND BUILDING ON A SERIES KNOWN FOR ITS INNOVATION

Nowadays we're oblivious to the importance the original *SimCity* had on the games industry, so ingrained the city builder has become to the culture of videogames that it's easy to overlook how imaginative and inventive the concept first was. Look at it on paper, in fact, and you'll likely be amazed the game managed such a level of untold success in the first place: here you play the mayor of a freshly created city, dealing with such grisly issues like tax rates, zoning of residential, commercial or industrial areas and even navigating the ultimate city problem, congestion. It certainly doesn't *sound* fun, does it?

But there's a magic to *SimCity* that just seems to work, a sense of nurturing pride as you overcome the admittedly doldrum issues of city management to create a thriving, healthy, safe and – most important of all – happy metropolis.

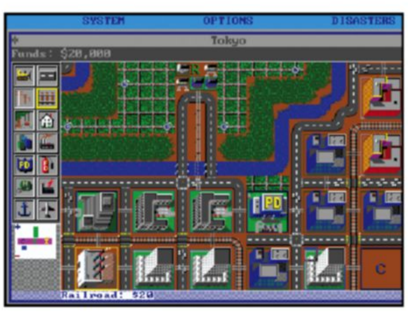
The origin of *SimCity* isn't quite that simple, however. Series creator Will Wright had only one game under his belt prior to its release, a simple top-down shoot-'em-up called *Raid On Bungeling Bay* published by Brøderbund for the Commodore 64 in 1984. It was surprisingly slick even back then but its development had an unexpected inspiration for Will, sending him down a completely different and – at the time – highly risky path. During the development of *Raid On Bungeling Bay*, Will found that he was having more fun designing the maps than he was actually controlling the game's helicopter and, combining this with his increasing interest in urban planning, set about developing a game where the objective wasn't to destroy a city but, instead, to build one.



» Will Wright created many excellent sim games at Maxis, ranging from *SimCity* to *The Sims* franchise.

Will had the first version of *SimCity* up and running by 1985, but it took four years before the game was actually published. Every publisher he met with had been unconvinced of its unusual gameplay: this wasn't a platformer, it didn't have puzzles, there wasn't anything to shoot. Most controversial of all, *SimCity* didn't even have an obvious goal; an unusual and – in the eyes of an Eighties publisher – unsellable concept. "I was working with Brøderbund at the time (back in the mid-Eighties) on the Commodore 64 version," says Will. "As I was developing it, they kept waiting for it to turn into a game, with a win or lose at the end. That's not what I envisioned it becoming. As far as I was concerned the "game" was done. As a matter of fact we did end up releasing the C64 version about three years later, untouched from what I was working on then."

Publishers continued to turn down *SimCity* – or as it was then know, *Micropolis* – until Will had a chance meeting with Jeff Braun, an investor who was looking to break into the flourishing games industry. Together they formed Maxis in 1987 and went on to self-publish *SimCity*. With the majority of the game already in place, it didn't take long for *SimCity* to hit the shelves; in 1989, *SimCity* launched ▶



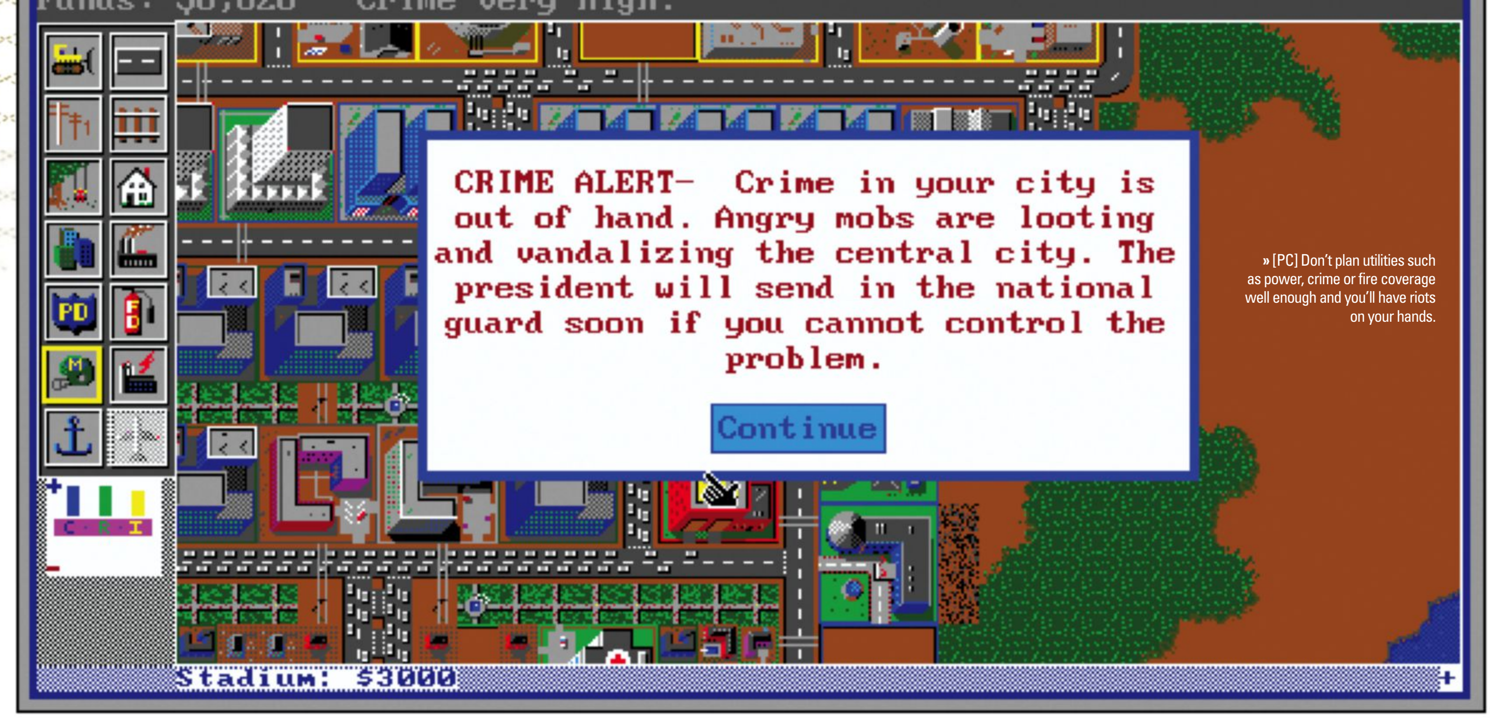
» [PC] How you designed your city was up to you: were you block-based or did you prefer long stretches of roads?

WHY I LOVE SIMCITY

IAN LIVINGSTONE EIDOS LIFE PRESIDENT



■ Well I was pretty obsessive about it, I must say. And people like building stuff, don't they? People enjoy having something that belongs to them, and a city is the embodiment of that feeling. Until it reaches the point that you think 'You know what, I can't see the point of this anymore, it's just too hard to manage' and you just suddenly stop. We all reach that point at some point, and I know I did and I haven't played it since. But I might play the new one and I might be re-engaged, because the first one gave me hours and hours of pleasure.



» [PC] Don't plan utilities such as power, crime or fire coverage well enough and you'll have riots on your hands.

for Amiga and Macintosh, with PC and Commodore 64 versions arriving later.

Initial sales were slow, but a huge backing from critics and the inevitable spread through word of mouth meant that *SimCity* quickly went on to sell in the millions. The initial 100,000 copies were sold out of Braun's living room, but the pace quickly outgrew the game's humble beginnings and, eventually, led to a whole new way of playing games. Now gamers were free to explore their own creativity, carefully cultivating an empty plot of land into a bustling city without the game ever directing them.

"From the very beginning I didn't want to impose a firm goal state on the player," explains Will Wright. "I always thought it was much more interesting to have the player decide in their own head what constitutes a "good" city; low crime, no traffic, high land values, fast growth? I think in some sense it started a new genre. It was also, I think, kind of the earliest example of a game that was leaning more to a mainstream audience. They were interesting people that were not necessarily into dragons or history or sports, and I think that is becoming more and more mainstream, kind of what you might call 'casual' gamers. And so they were games that were more about reality than fantasy." It was a market that hadn't yet been tapped into.

WHY I LOVE SIMCITY

PETER MOLYNEUX CO-FOUNDER BULLFROG



■ I can remember the first *SimCity* I played with David Bishop who is now the creative director on *Moshi Monsters*. It was ridiculous low-res in those days, it was these little tiles and pixels for cars but the thing I loved about it was that you could imagine what you were building and that's the great thing about building a city. And when you did get pissed off with these needy people – because they are very needy, they want their sewage cleaned and the water taken out and all of that stuff – you just hit them with all those disasters. It's a joy to wipe out millions of people. I like the latest version, but I am as frustrated as other people that when I want to play it I can't seem to get online.

The games being released were primarily focused at a young male audience, targeting a very specific and unvaried set of people. Though this new audience was never the initial intention behind Will's development of the game – he simply believed that if he was interested in a subject, then there ought to be other gamers out there that did too – he knew that his game was doing something completely different within the industry.

"It was more that I was interested in these subjects, I was interested in the way games intersected reality. I enjoyed playing these other games a lot and I just felt that there wasn't enough exploration of games that were really about getting people to think about the world around them. So in the back of my mind my assumption was that this would appeal to a wider range of people."

SimCity went on to inspire a number of games, some of which went a step further to create their own distinct variations on this sandbox toolset. *Civilization*'s Sid Meier, for example, states the original simulation as a large inspiration for his own history simulator, a game that went on to formulate the 4X sub-genre of strategy games. This was a new age for video games, with Will Wright's original *SimCity* paving the way for something new, something different, something *creative*.

Yet while the innovations of *SimCity* were innumerable, it was the freedom to express a personal creativity that caught most gamers' attention. "I think a lot of [my] games invited the player in to put a lot of themselves into them," says Will, "so when people would play *SimCity* or even *The Sims* a lot of their assumptions about the way the world works was also invited in.

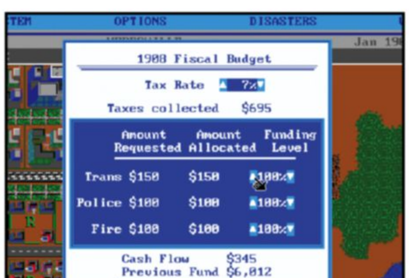
"What do you think makes a good city? Is it less crime, less traffic, less pollution? Or for *The Sims*, what makes you happy? And so in that case the game wasn't giving you an explicit goal; *SimCity* wasn't saying you had to

"I DIDN'T WANT TO IMPOSE A FIRM GOAL ON THE PLAYER"

WILL WRIGHT, CREATOR, ON THE ORIGINAL SIMCITY



» [PC] Without worries of water consumption of terrain differences this was less of an issue with the original.



» [PC] Managing your finances is key to any *SimCity* game. Spend too much and it'll only spiral out of control.

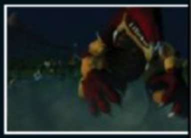


» [SNES] The isometric viewpoint was popular at the time, but it remains timeless thanks to the beautiful sprites.

TEARING DOWN THE HOUSE

DISASTERS HAVE BEEN A HUGE PART OF THE SIMCITY FRANCHISE SINCE ITS INCEPTION, SOME OF WHICH HAVE BEEN SEEN IN EACH AND EVERY ENTRY IN THE SERIES

GODZILLA



■ A giant reptile marches on your city, destroying everything in its path that seems to be attracted to polluted cities. One of the few recurring disasters throughout the series.

PLANE CRASH



■ Both randomly occurring and self-inflicted, this disaster appeared in most *SimCity* games up until *SimCity 4* where it was removed due to the 9/11 attacks.

TORNADO



■ Another reappearing disaster, the tornado appears at a randomly selected spot in your city, wrecking any buildings caught in the storm as it uncontrollably rips through your metropolis.

NUCLEAR MELTDOWN



■ One surefire protection from this disaster is to simply avoid the use of nuclear power plants. The effect varies from game to game, but there's always one real outcome: destruction.

UFO ATTACK



■ This unique disaster has appeared in every *SimCity* game (though only in the SNES version of the original). It was even deemed important enough to grace the cover of *SimCity 2000.*

VOLCANO

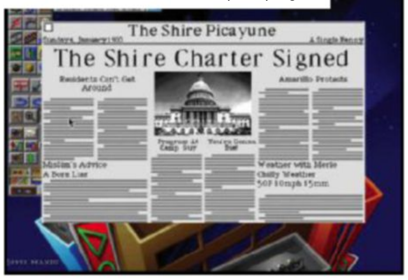


■ Volcanoes were in *SimCity 2000* and *SimCity 4*, but it's only in the latter that they were a real visual treat. The earth tearing apart buildings is one thing, but unstoppable fires are the true threat.

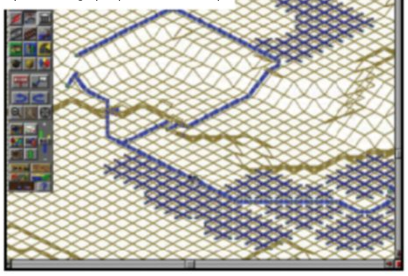
ZOMBIES



■ Only available in *SimCity* (2013), there's a chance of zombies appearing if you build a large hospital. The infection spreads, killing your Sims, but all danger vanishes with the morning sun.



» [SNES] The newspaper feature was brimmed with content, with new stories to read every time you got it.



» [SNES] The addition of water and an underground layer was hugely important to *SimCity.*

make a big city or you had to make a happy city, the first thing the player had to do was sit down and think in their head 'okay, to me, what kind of city would I want to live in?' or in *The Sims* 'what kind of life do I want to lead?' In both cases I think the player was critical in determining goal state, and then you could look at someone's city and get a sense of who they were just by the way they were playing the game and what they were pursuing."

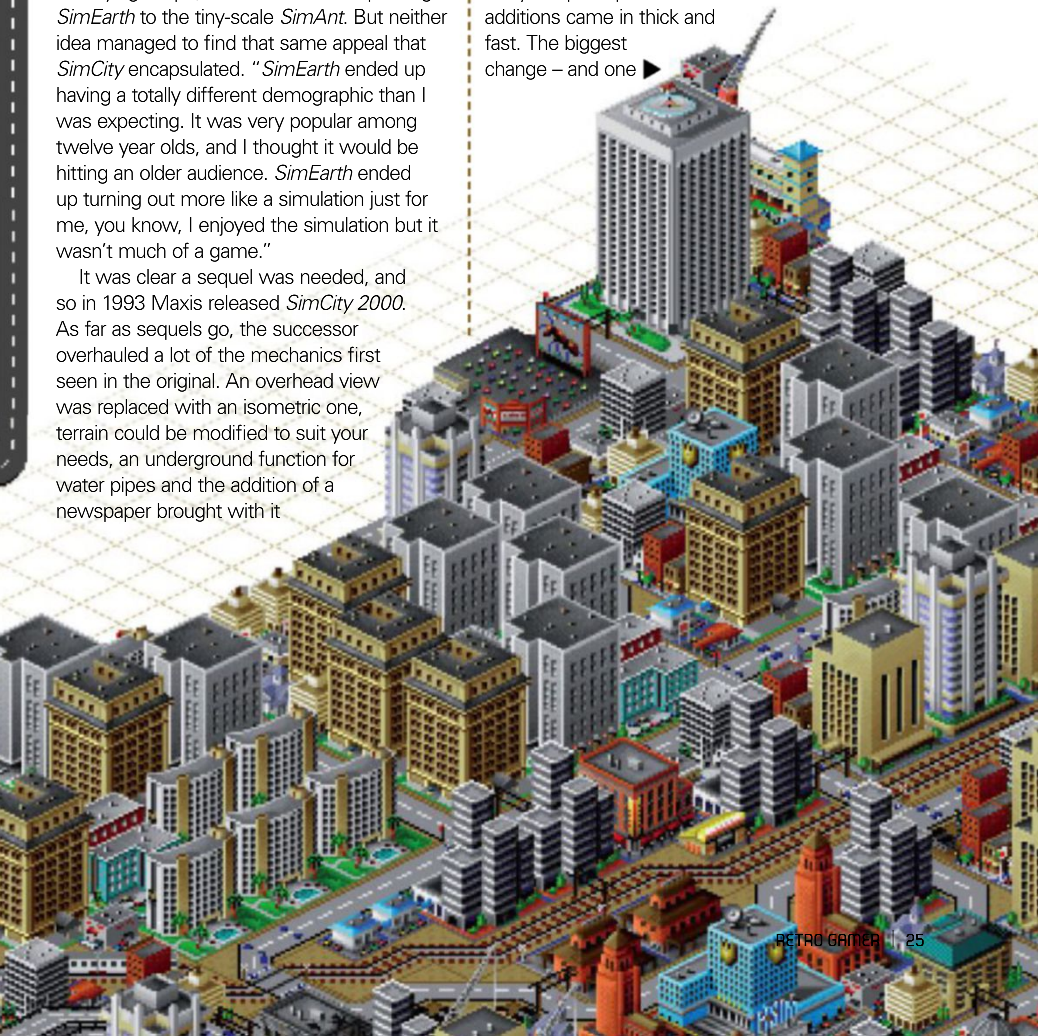
Neither Will nor Jeff Braun ever expected *SimCity* to reach the same levels of success that it did, but succeed it did. "It was unexpected for me," says Will, "I never really thought it would be a big seller. I thought it would appeal to strategy players but didn't think that it would have the wide appeal it ended up having."

While the success of *SimCity* marched on – it managed to find a port of the game on practically every electronic device then available – Will Wright moved onto games of varying scope, from the all-encompassing *SimEarth* to the tiny-scale *SimAnt*. But neither idea managed to find that same appeal that *SimCity* encapsulated. "*SimEarth* ended up having a totally different demographic than I was expecting. It was very popular among twelve year olds, and I thought it would be hitting an older audience. *SimEarth* ended up turning out more like a simulation just for me, you know, I enjoyed the simulation but it wasn't much of a game."

It was clear a sequel was needed, and so in 1993 Maxis released *SimCity 2000*. As far as sequels go, the successor overhauled a lot of the mechanics first seen in the original. An overhead view was replaced with an isometric one, terrain could be modified to suit your needs, an underground function for water pipes and the addition of a newspaper brought with it humour and an easy means of discovering exactly what your Sims wanted. This was all alongside the inclusion of multiple new buildings, power sources and even an alternate sprite for the abandoned structures.

"We received lots of letters after releasing the first *SimCity*," says Will. "I read all of them. The players were asking for most of the same things I wanted to add as well; terrain altitude, schools, water systems. The trick was adding enough to make it deeper without making it too unapproachable." But Will was still keen on working on the myriad other ideas he had, he wasn't even particularly interested in working on the sequel. "I actually was trying to avoid working on it. I had another game I wanted to focus on at the time – which later became *The Sims*. We had another guy working on it, but the progress was way too slow. At that point I dropped everything and started working on it with him."

With Will back on board the production really ramped up and the new additions came in thick and fast. The biggest change – and one ▶



WHY I LOVE SIMCITY

OCEAN QUIGLEY CREATIVE DIRECTOR, SIMCITY



■ "I'm immensely proud of *SimCity 4*, but the new *SimCity* is the realization of things that I've wanted to do with *SimCity* since, well, since art directing *SimCity 3000*."



▶ that has since stayed with the franchise – was the distinction between zoning and utility buildings. As the mayor you decided where your citizens could live, work or shop, but which final form appeared was entirely down to the game's system. Beyond that it was now possible to place schools, improve the coverage of your civics with separate buildings and provide water and sewerage treatment with dedicated under-road construction.

It was even possible to enact ordinances, special options that – once unlocked – could be toggled on or off to benefit your city in some way. At their most basic, ordinances reduced an ailment of your city – such as crime, disease or unemployment – but your city's income took a hit. Alternatively, options such as Legalized Gambling or Parking Fines boosted your income, but dramatically affected the growth of residential or commercial zoning.

It was still *SimCity*, but with an increased number of knobs and buttons to tweak to the world to your choosing. The underlying mechanics were much the same, but it was now more accessible than ever, a feature that was key to the success of not only the franchise but of many of Will Wright's creations. "I think that when you can sit and play with a complex system like that," explains Will, "you get an almost intuitive sense of it, much more so than reading about it or watching a movie. You can actually interact with it, and you can get some sense of, you know, you push something in here and something pops out there. There are all these interrelationships and some of them are very subtle."

It wasn't until 1999 that the next *SimCity* appeared, after a number of stumbles along the way. Initially pitched as an entirely 3D game, *SimCity 3000* was looking to once again rework the entire system that had been set before it, despite concerns over the new approach. In 1997 EA acquired Maxis and set to work on fixing many of the project's early failings. Lucy Bradshaw was brought in as lead producer, a name many series' fans will likely recognise since Bradshaw has been a large part of the culture at Maxis for years.

The 3D visuals were scrapped – which Will suggests "was the right decision" – and an emphasis on sprites and isometric cameras were once again implemented. Instead of overhauling the game it was more about expanding that definitive *SimCity* experience. Zoning was divided into three different tiers of density, with low density spawning smaller size buildings while high density created skyscrapers and the like. It didn't look or feel like much of an improvement, but the change was dramatic; now, instead of being at the mercy of the game's hidden mechanics, *SimCity* players had far more control over the look and feel of their metropolises.

Though the ability to trade with neighbouring cities was first implemented in *SimCity 2000*, it was properly expanded upon with the third game. Now it was possible to buy electricity, water or sewage treatment from outlying cities, as well as form business deals that paid financial compensation for enabling the construction of undesirable buildings. This focus of regional gameplay became a large focus of the *SimCity* franchise going forward, with Will believing it was "hard to do a reasonable simulation of a city in complete isolation."

Advisors were also implemented to better tailor the experience, giving unsure gamers a clearer path towards building a great city. Even the innovative newspaper feature was reworked into a news ticker, which advertised various issues with your city along the bottom of the screen and retained the series' sense of humour when all was well with your citizens. Though the improvements came with a couple of victims – fewer disasters and ordinances being the primary losses – it was nonetheless received well by critics and gamers alike, the added depth giving long-lasting appeal. At this point *SimCity* – and Maxis itself – had built itself a devoted fanbase, and EA ▶

WHY I LOVE SIMCITY

JAMIE WOODHOUSE MRQWAK.COM



■ I remember playing it on the Atari ST when it first came out. Very blocky square graphics aplenty! You got your basic three zone types (residential, commercial, industrial), and natural disasters (and, IIRC, godzilla type events). I think traffic (cars) was visually represented by streams of larger chunky pixels. Was pretty novel and unique back then!

WHY I LOVE SIMCITY

DENNIS SHIRK SENIOR PRODUCER AT FIRAXIS



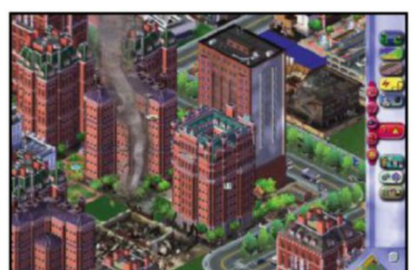
■ I think I stopped at *SimCity 2000* – not stopped playing but that version, because that's the one that stuck on my mobile devices at that point, it was available everywhere. I first started playing that on my Mac. But I haven't played the newer versions since then, that's just the best version – I've always loved that version, I don't know why. It's kind of one of those things where if you grow up with it – and I didn't necessarily grow up with *SimCity 2000* – if you put a lot of time into it, newer versions tend to just scare you off. You just love what you have. The new one really, really intrigues me and I really, really want to play it, and it's a combination of not having the time to play it and waiting for the issues to be smoothed out. But yeah, *SimCity 2000* is the one I played the most – I don't know why. I honestly could not put any finger on it, I have fond memories thinking back: the natural disasters, the nuclear plants are constantly going off. I have a lot of fond memories of it.

"YOU GET AN ALMOST INTUITIVE SENSE OF IT"

WILL WRIGHT, CREATOR, ON SIMCITY 2000



» [PC] *SimCity 3000* was massive: your cities could become absolutely sprawling metropolises.



» [PC] Disasters were a therapeutic end to a play sessions, providing you remembered not to save afterwards.

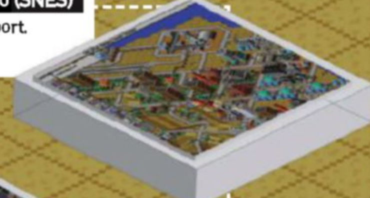
MY SIMCITY

WE ASKED READERS VIA FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND THE FORUM TO BUILD THEIR OWN CITIES. HERE ARE THE RESULTS…

PETER FORSEN

CHOSEN GAME: SIMCITY 2000 (SNES)

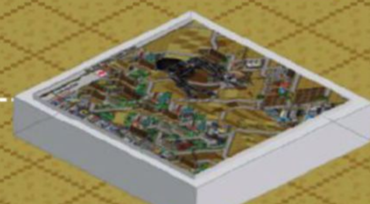
"The lucky Sims have built an Airport. Holidays in Majorca await for all."





"Only the rich and famous can afford to live in the middle of town on Peppermint Hill."

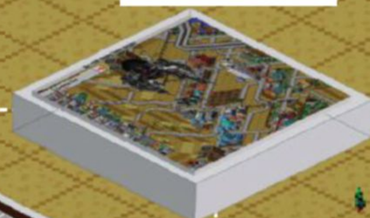
"But what's this? A one eyed Metal-Spider-Beast straight from Hell. ARRRGGGHHH!!!"





"The Sims are zapped and beamed and probed and terrorised. AAARRRGGGGHHH!!!!"

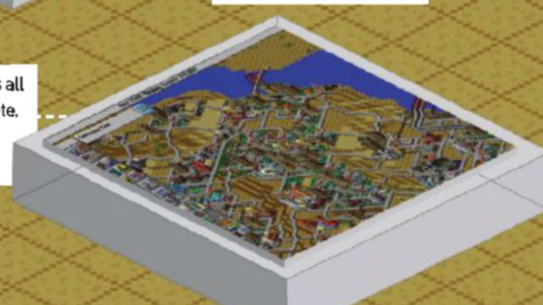
"It looks like he's leaving. Hooray!"





"Forget the Alien Probe - there are teen workers in Town Replay, the shame of it."

"… but the City lives all thanks to Mayor Pete. Hip Hip Hooray for Mayor Pete."



JOE HERON



CHOSEN GAME: SIMCITY (SNES)

"What I liked about *SimCity* on the SNES was the re-introduction to the character DR Wright from *The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening* on the Game Boy. His quirky tips and advice helped me a lot whilst playing the game. Also the music was fantastic and sort of gives you the same calm experience what *MineCraft* gives you whilst playing. I did an experiment and swapped the *MineCraft* music with the *SimCity* music and they went hand in hand. For me *SimCity* is the perfect game to play after a long stressful day and the music and game play (like when the seasons change) are something to behold. I have also made a five-part tutorial showing you some tips I have learnt whilst playing the game, you can find them on my YouTube channel: RETR0JOE"

ALEŠ WALTER

CHOSEN GAME: SIMCITY CLASSIC (PC)

"This town is from *SimCity Classic*, which will run just fine on any 32-bit version of Windows. The great thing is that on modern LCD with HD resolution you can see half of your city on single screen. Pretty neat."



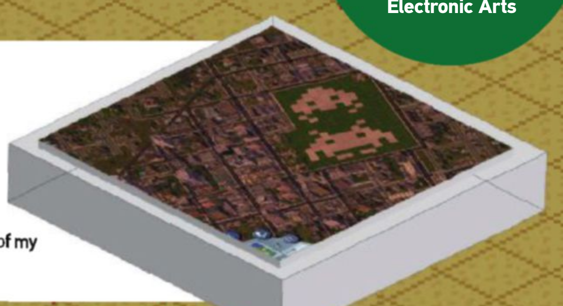
SIMCITY

Each featured city receives a free copy of *SimCity*, courtesy of Electronic Arts

NEIL COTTON

CHOSEN GAME: SIMCITY 4 (PC)

"Thanks for inspiring me to dig out my old copy of *SimCity 4*. I've been working on my city, New Southampton, for the past couple of evenings and it's grown quite nicely. I've just done a bit of re-modelling of my city as you can see here."



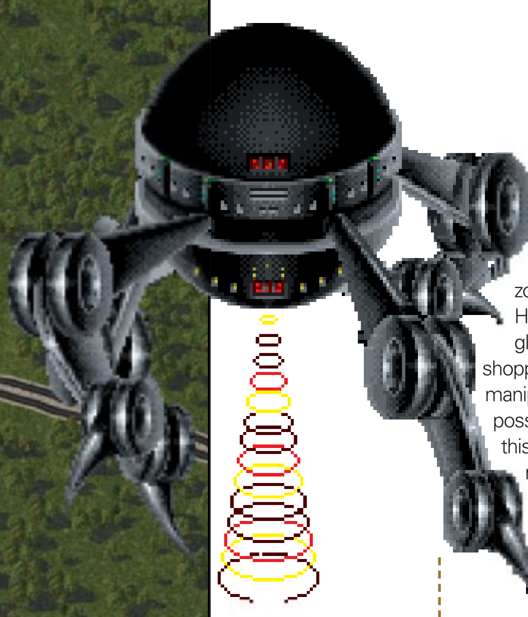
WHY I LOVE SIMCITY

TRIP HAWKINS FOUNDER OF ELECTRONIC ARTS



■ When I first heard about and saw the original version of *SimCity*, I knew it would be a hit and I was very disappointed that we at EA were not going to be the proud publishers. I have a lot of respect for what Maxis built.





» [PC] The mechanics behind *SimCity 4* were so deep that experienced players would need to use the Alt and Shift keys regularly.

▶ was well aware of that. *The Sims* released in 2000, propelling Maxis even further into the limelight and introducing a world of new gamers keen on Will Wright's balance of accessible and compelling gameplay. EA didn't want to upset its symbiotic relationship too much, so when it released *SimCity 4* in 2003 there was little in the way of change.

Most of the work went into building a 3D engine, replacing sprites for renders. Still the camera was locked to a single, isometric viewpoint and only a handful of zoom options were available, but it at least looked the part. *SimCity 4* also included the ability to import your characters from *The Sims*, tempting fans of the real-life simulator into expanding out into deeper strategy.

And again Maxis focused its efforts on the regional play of its cities. More than any other *SimCity* before it, the fourth iteration and its RCI demands were heavily reliant on not only the zoning, quality and taxes of the city you're working on, but the wider world of your region. Cities connected via highways or trade ports could make business arrangements as before, but this time the Sims demanded zones based on outlying details too. High-wealth citizens in one city would gladly commute to a high density shopping area in another, and clever manipulation of taxes meant it was possible to design a thriving city around this. The simulation was more balanced, more complex and more considered than ever before, but at the expense of accessibility. The series had thrived on its intuitiveness and though its depth gave it added longevity for the devoted fanbase, the difficulty of understanding the fundamentals meant not everyone was taken with this improved *SimCity*.

Eager to rectify some of these shortcomings, an expansion pack for *SimCity 4* was released only nine months after the initial release, but though *SimCity 4: Rush Hour* answered some of the criticisms of its companion title, by then it was too late. The casual gamers that had once thrived on *SimCity* now had something closer to home in *The Sims*, and interest in the series was waning.

Will Wright later admitted that *SimCity* had become increasingly complex, stating that the franchise was headed for a shift in approach. As if highlighting this point, *SimCity Societies* launched in 2007 and wasn't even developed at Maxis, with Tilted Mill Entertainment taking

WHY I LOVE SIMCITY

STE PICKFORD CO-FOUNDER OF ZIPPO GAMES



■ My strongest memory of *SimCity* is from the more recent re-release of the SNES version on the Wii Virtual Console. I never played the SNES one at the time, so I downloaded this specifically to play with my two young daughters, and all three of us really enjoyed it. They were both hooked on it for a month or so, and would play it every day. So the SNES one is definitely my favourite. It was just so easy to understand and play, despite being quite a complex simulation.

My favourite story about the first *SimCity* is hearing that someone complained to the developers that there was a bug in the game, as no matter what he did in the game - bigger roads, light rail systems, et cetera. – he could never remove traffic congestion from the centre of his city. The developers said it's not a bug, it's real life! Every city in the world has traffic congestion in the city centre! I enjoyed *SimCity 4*, but I don't think I'll bother with the new one. Tiny cities are a deal breaker for me.

"[MAXIS] DID A GOOD JOB BALANCING ALL THE FACTORS"

WILL WRIGHT, CREATOR, ON THE LATEST SIMCITY



» [PC] The ability to hop into different cars and drive around your city was poorly implemented but strangle compelling.



» [PC] The visual design of the latest *SimCity* makes it really easy for anyone to enjoy.



WHY I LOVE SIMCITY

MICHAEL CHRIEN MAXIS



■ My favourite *SimCity* is *SimCity 4* with the *Rush Hour* Expansion pack. I loved the scope and size of the game, as well as the wide variety of different buildings you could place. It would always pain me to draw roads through forests and cause the fauna to disappear – the small details like that really made the game feel alive.

the reins for the new project. Accessibility was the key here, and many of the tools previously given to players throughout the series had been removed – power lines, building evolution, purchase of individual structures and even zoning were all missing. It was more accessible, but it wasn't more fun, and to many gamers, felt like a big step back for the popular franchise.

To the rest of the world it seemed as if the series had finally peaked. The rise of smartphone gaming had meant that the casual market that the series had been so reliant on had long since dissipated, and it seemed Maxis was left to eternally create expansion packs for its still-popular *The Sims* franchise, leaving *SimCity* behind. Until 2012, this is, when EA announced *SimCity* – a reboot of the series and the fifth 'true' *SimCity* game in the franchise.

This time around the underlying mechanics were completely rewritten with a new Agent system, ensuring every citizen of the world was an individual, thinking 'person', designed to add to the world in a believable way. The franchise's focus on regional gameplay was more important than ever, with the city plot sizes limited in scope in a bid to direct gameplay onto more varied and specialised city types.

SimCity launched in 2013 to unexpected success, with EA claiming it was the biggest launch of any *SimCity* game yet. This came with its own unique problems, however, and the combination of a heavy load on the servers and a required always-on internet connection meant gamers were outraged at being unable to play a game that had up until then been a single-player experience.

Queue times of thirty minutes just to play the game deterred gamers from what was actually an innovative approach to the tried-and-tested formula. Will Wright wasn't quite as down on the latest *SimCity*, however, and having left Maxis in 2009 meant his insights on the direction of the reboot of his franchise felt more relevant than ever. "It's interesting, in some sense it reminds me of the post-economic crash," Will tells us. "It's not about making your city big, it's about making them not poor. I think they did a good job of balancing all the interrelated factors."

The uproar surrounding this *SimCity* reboot proved one thing, however: it's clear there's still a lot of devoted fans out there eager to play more of this unique city building simulation. The future of the franchise may look pretty grim from here on out, but there's no denying that *SimCity* remains as important as it ever was.



» [PC] The latest *SimCity* has enraged gamers due to it being constantly online. Free games were given out to placate early buyers.



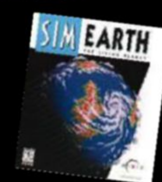
MORE FROM WRIGHT

RAID ON BUNGELING BAY 1984



■ Will Wright's original game, and the only one that could ever be considered 'mainstream'. *Raid On Bungeling Bay* saw you controlling a helicopter to hunt down and destroy enemy defences. A precursor to *Sudden Strike*, *Raid On Bungeling Bay* was quick, well designed but a little confusing.

SIMEARTH 1990



■ Possibly the ultimate simulation, *SimEarth* began at the birth of a planet with your task being to carefully assist in the evolution of its creatures and environments. In a lot of ways, *SimEarth* set the foundation for *Spore*, but too much of the game was spent watching a simulation rather than actually playing a game.

SIMANT 1991



■ *SimAnt* might not sound like the most thrilling concept, but at its heart is a considered RTS game. Hampered by technical limitations of the hardware, Will nonetheless managed to rework his *SimEarth* system into something more useable as a game. Build nests, increase your population, then decimate the enemy.

SIMCOPTER 1996



■ Pre-EA takeover Maxis had quite a couple of suspect releases, and *SimCopter* was one of them. Will took to helicopters again, and though the actual controls of the game were fairly well implemented, the poor 3D rendering and bugginess of *SimCopter* was not the sign of a Maxis in good health. It sold very little.

THE SIMS 2000



■ The ultimate PC game, *The Sims* has gone on to sell millions and millions. *The Sims* was originally named *Home Tactics* and was to be based around architecture, until Will Wright's idea of creating a game based around a doll house changed the game's direction. *The Sims* remains a multi-million PC franchise.

SID MEIER'S SIMGOLF 2002



■ Though it was Sid Meier's name on the box, it was as much the work of Maxis as it was Firaxis. A combination of two of the greatest studios, *SimGolf* tasked you with designing and building your own golf courses. It hit a niche audience, but provided enough depth that fans of *Rollercoaster Tycoon* could easily be swayed.

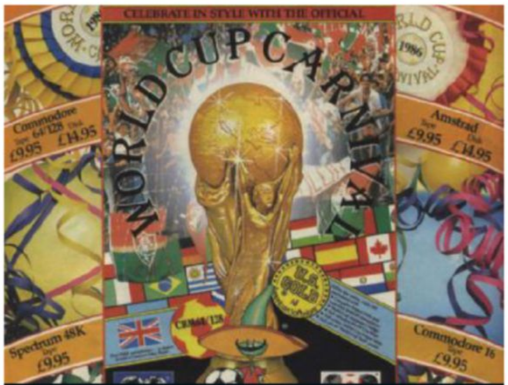
SPORE 2008



■ Taking the concept set before it with *SimEarth*, Will once again took on the concept of evolution with *Spore*. Customisation was the key selling point, which invariably lead to thousands of gamers creating phallic monsters to attack each other with. Give a gamer the ability to create and they will, invariably, make a penis.

10 LAUNCH DISASTERS

As the launch of the latest SimCity found itself making headlines for all the wrong reasons, we take a look at more videogame launch disasters that have happened over the years



WORLD CUP CARNIVAL

People don't much like having itchy wool pulled over their eyes, so any company brave enough to try must expect a barrage of vitriol if found out. U.S. Gold experienced this with *World Cup Carnival* – the official football game of the Mexico '86 World Cup. When U.S. Gold won the licence it began developing the game internally. However, when the project hit a few hurdles and the deadline began nearing, Gold purchased the rights to Artic's *World Cup Football* (a game released a couple of years earlier), made a few modifications to the game and crossed all its fingers. Suffice to say, reviewers and consumers immediately cried foul, and *World Cup Carnival* was not well received at all.



DIABLO III

A decade in the waiting, worry began surfacing among fans when it was announced the game would adhere to an always-online DRM (read: anti-piracy) policy – meaning players would have to be online and connected to servers to play it. To generate anticipation, Blizzard allowed fans to pre-order the game and have it sit on their computers locked until the stroke of launch day. When that time came, unsurprisingly, Blizzard's servers were unable to sustain a gazillion *Diablo III* fans logging on to play it. This resulted in many being turned away with the now infamous Error 37 message – explaining that the servers were busy and to try again later – and unable to play it.



AMSTRAD GX4000

The GX4000 was Amstrad's first and only attempt at breaking into the console market. Battling more powerful 16-bit computers from Atari and Commodore, and its main rival the Sega Mega Drive, with a game library of enhanced Amstrad CPC games, it was a short fight. Ultimately, software and media support wasn't there, the marketing budget was unable to compete, and though Ocean produced a few impressive titles (*Pang*, *Burning Rubber*), the machine quickly saw a price drop and was discontinued. Had the GX4000 been released a few years earlier, things might have turned out differently. Amstrad later failed to enter the console market with the Amstrad Mega PC – an Amstrad PC/Mega Drive hybrid.



ACORN ELECTRON

The Acorn Electron failed to match the success of other British 8-bit micros such as the ZX Spectrum, CPC and C64, though perhaps part of the reason could rest with its disastrous pre-1983 Christmas launch, which didn't place it in the most glowing of early positions. With pre-orders of around 300,000 units, things looked promising initially. But when a manufacturing problem concerning its internal chips was discovered, only a small percent actually reached shops and customers. Not wanting to disappoint the kids on Christmas day, many parents turned to rival computers. When the issue was eventually rectified, demand for the machine had dipped.



GIZMONDO

For the full story behind the Gizmondo fiasco – probably the messiest hardware flop in game history – check out the article by *Wired*. A brief summary: Gizmondo started life as a child-tracking GPS before it evolved into a GPS receiver/MP3 and video player/camera/silly looking games device. But that muddiness ran deeper. Its parent company was formed by merging a GPS company with a floor covering business, and one of its senior executives, Stefan Erikson, had links to organised crime in Sweden. After crashing a Ferrari Enzo in southern California, Erikson was caught by authorities and with him an elaborate plan to trick investors out of millions of dollars.



VANGUARD SAGA OF HEROES

There have been many launch disasters on PC. Even one of its darlings, *Half-Life 2*, which launched with Steam (which had its own issues at launch), suffered from digital-registration issues stemming from demand exceeding tech expectations. For *Vanguard Saga Of Heroes*, an ambitious high fantasy MMO, the problem stemmed from the fact that it was released unfinished. Upon launch, the game had more bugs than Bugs Bunny's family tree and was missing features that were promised. With debts mounting, the *Vanguard* IP was acquired by Sony Online Entertainment and many staff at Sigil got laid off in an infamous briefing that took place in the company car park.

P 10 LAUNCH DISASTERS 10 LAUNCH





VIRTUAL BOY

The Virtual Boy probably marks the biggest hardware failure in the history of Nintendo. Sharing production with the N64, Nintendo pushed the console to market early. When it was released in 1995, its garish red-tinted monochrome visuals, and clunky design form left many consumers and developers cold and confused. And arriving to market around a year after the PlayStation and Sega Saturn, under the telly gaming was where it was at, the machine failed to strike a chord with gamers. Released only in Japan and North America and selling below one million units, its legacy is Nintendo's most high-profile hardware failure.



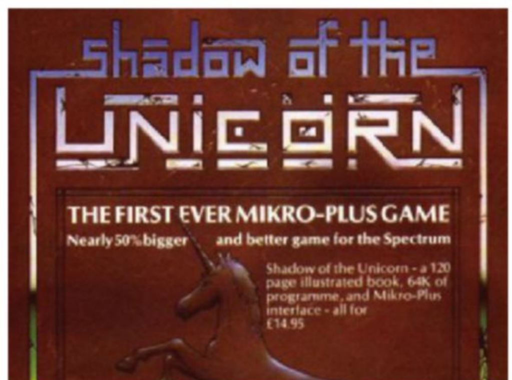
GAMEGADGET

The idea behind the GameGadget was good: a portable gaming device that would legalise emulation that would launch alongside an iTunes-style online shop to purchase games from. Many were under the impression Blaze was courting big publishers and would secure their support for the device ahead of launch. When the GameGadget released with a library of the same Sega titles that had appeared on its previous Blaze devices, it became apparent that the support wasn't there. This led to poor customer service, after unhappy customers started complaining on GameGadget's official forums. It remains a massively missed opportunity.



DAIKATANA

Perhaps the first example of a videogame hype getting a bit silly, *Daikatana* benefitted although later became victim of *Doom* and *Quake*'s imposing shadow. Also being the first game from John Romero after leaving id Software and establishing Ion Storm, the hype train could be heard long before a screenshot was ever seen. Struck by delays, design overhauls, blown budgets, and poor marketing decisions, everything rested on it delivering. And sadly it didn't. The finished game featured some nice ideas (such as sidekick characters you could dish orders out to, and a narrative that centred on time travel), but the gameplay didn't live up to Romero's previous FPS efforts.



SHADOW OF THE UNICORN AND THE MIKRO-PLUS

Creators of the popular *Wally Week* series, with staff that included Chris Hinsley, Raff Cecco and David Perry, Mikro-Gen had all to play for. That was until an ambitious adventure game packaged with 120 page book and a clever 16K Rom add-on for the Spectrum knocked them for six. Reputedly investing £130,000 in the project and ordering 25,000 units of the game, Mikro-Gen bet big on the project. Behind the scenes the game fell into problems, and the eventual game that was released bombed. *Unicorn* was the only game released for the Mikro-Plus.

A MOMENT WITH...

Stuart Ross

The composer of the highly underrated Body Harvest, and much praised Grand Theft Auto series, talks creating game music with Denis Murphy



Who is Stuart Ross?

First marking out his gaming territory in 1997 with his work on *Grand Theft Auto*, as well as three of its sequels, Stuart continued to solely compose *Body Harvest* for the N64. With a rich body of work behind him, in recent years Stuart has lent his talents to titles such as *APB* and *DiRT 3*.

Over your career, how has your creative process evolved?
On *Body Harvest* in 1998 I used a MIDI sequencer, and I still use one now. So the actual creative process is the same but sound palette at your disposal is pretty much infinite with today's audio design tech. But the main difference, and one that is often overlooked, is the amount of restriction we had. With *Body Harvest* I was limited to eight channels, so you had to be creative with your chord voicings and instrumentation. I still use this method when composing today, less is always more.

So how did you land your role on *Grand Theft Auto*?
GTA was just one of a bunch of titles we were developing and we needed to come up with a way of making it interesting from an audio point of view. We were always trying as a department to have something unique about the audio in our games. So after a few meetings, we decided to create some radio stations for the cars. Most of my work on the game was playing the instruments. We had guitars and bass, we even had a programmer play drums in the warehouse we used to call our 'studio'. It did have a good reverb, though.

On *GTA2* you had much more creative input. As opposed to normal game music, how did you approach a soundtrack that basically emulated pop/rock songs?
Yeah, it gave us a new avenue to try out, rather than the music being a soundtrack like a film, we could give the game a certain time or feel, and give the player options of what style of music they would want to listen to by having different styles of radio stations, like rock and dance etc. It gave us more creative freedom to write what we wanted to rather than being confined to one particular style.

What were you aiming to achieve with the music for *Body Harvest*?
We went through a few different styles and ideas from the in-house guys, all having a bash but with more cooks comes more issues, and as the project went on, other games in development required audio resource so it was left to me to finish it up. So one morning looking for ideas I turned on the radio and for some reason it was on BBC Radio 3, and some orchestral piece was playing so I thought I'd give it a go myself, never having written much orchestration music before. After a day of sourcing samples and writing ideas, it was obvious this was the style for this game.



» [N64] Stuart was heavily inspired by the work of John Williams for his *Body Harvest* composition.



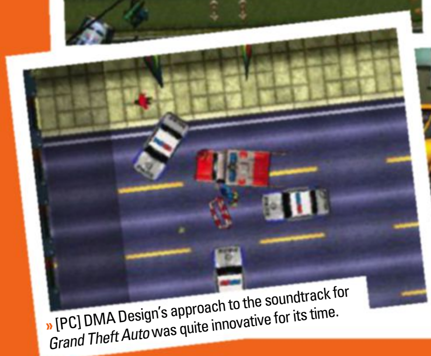
The other good thing was that I could reuse the samples over and over and get a lot higher sample rates in there, rather than loads of small, lower quality ones. Listening to various John Williams scores also helped.

You wrote the theme songs for both *GTA III* and *Vice City*. In both cases, what were you seeking to achieve?
With *GTA III*, it was basically an urban gangster movie with a lone protagonist against the city of which there are so many films like that. We wanted to give it an aged feel as well, like a Steve McQueen movie from the Seventies. With *Vice City*, again a time reference was quite obvious, but you don't want it to be too obvious a rip of an Eighties theme. Looking at the Miami sound there's loads of reference to pick from, Miami Sound Machine for the horn section, Jan Hammer for the synth lines, again all these factors help you shape your sound along with a deadline and space to fill, you get there pretty quick.

Favourite *GTA* track?
The Bull Is Wrong by the Alpha Banditos and also *Fade Away* by Craig Grey. We had a lot of fun making up names as well! Good times.



» [PC] Compared to *GTA 1*, *GTA 2*'s soundtrack had radio stations tailored towards specific gangs in the game.





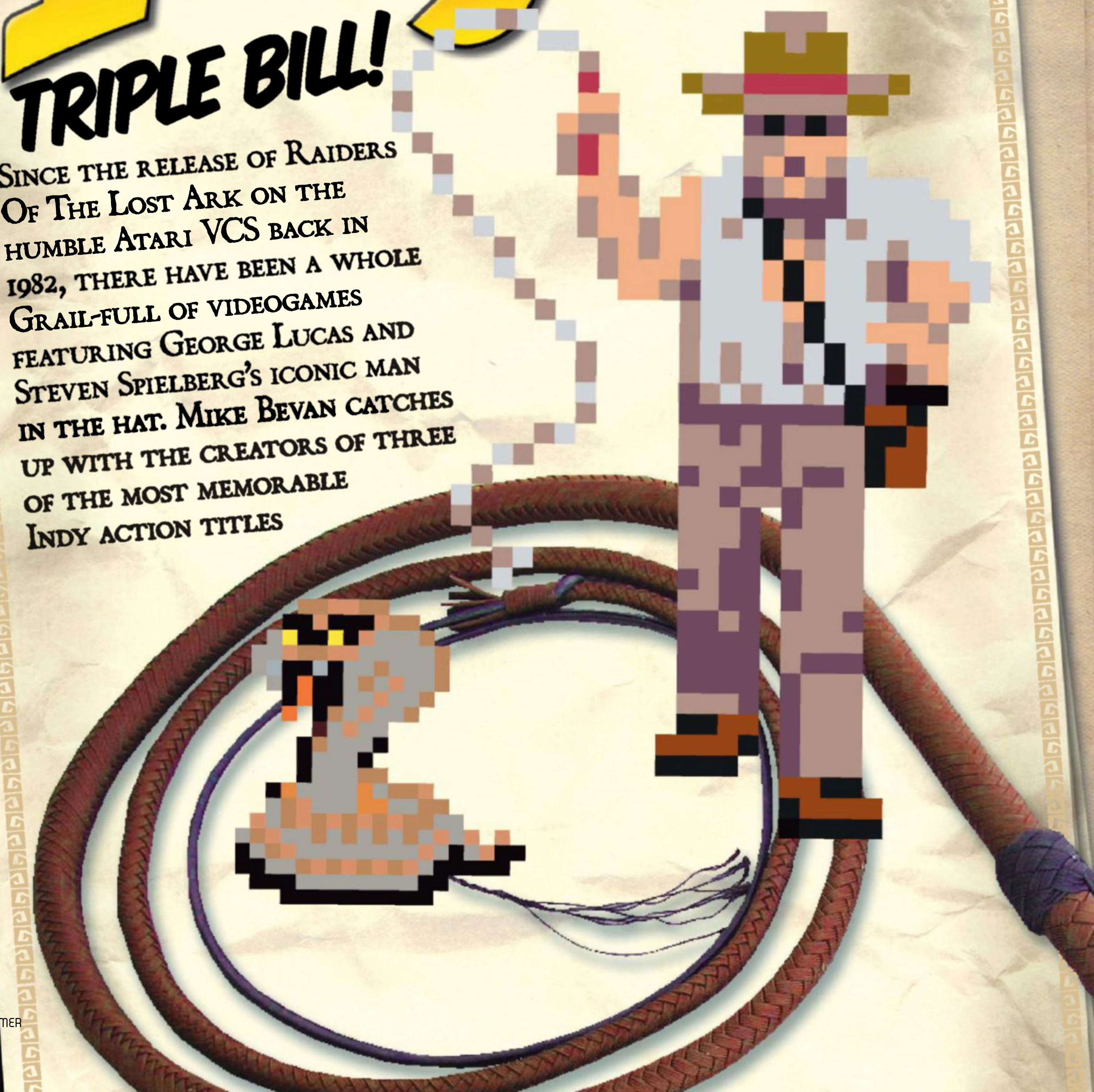
» [PC] DMA Design's approach to the soundtrack for *Grand Theft Auto* was quite innovative for its time.

Making of Special

Indiana Jones®

Triple Bill!

Since the release of Raiders Of The Lost Ark on the humble Atari VCS back in 1982, there have been a whole Grail-full of videogames featuring George Lucas and Steven Spielberg's iconic man in the hat. Mike Bevan catches up with the creators of three of the most memorable Indy action titles







» [Arcade] Avoid snakes and whip Thuggee guards to free the trapped kids.



Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom 1985 (Arcade/Atari)

I really don't remember how I ended up with that one," admits Peter Lipson, director of the *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom* arcade game. "Around that same time, Dennis Harper had started *Return Of The Jedi*. I suspect that what must have happened is that a few of us who were available to start new projects split up some new licences that Atari had acquired. I remember Michael Jackson in the building around then, as Mark Cerny was looking at *Thriller*, Clint Eastwood coming by while *Firefox* was getting started, and Jim Davis visiting to talk about doing a *Garfield* game while Ed Logg was looking at a laser-disk *Road Runner*. So there were a lot of licences around." Peter is certainly full of surprises, even after this celebrity-packed anecdotal snippet.

He proceeds to reveal the original reason for pursuing the *Temple Of Doom* licence, which was to create an entirely cinematic arcade experience, much like the full-motion video-based *Firefox*. "We wanted to find some games that we could make using laser-disk technology," he discloses, "probably because of *Dragon's Lair*. We wanted to use overlays, rather than just showing clips like *Dragon's Lair* did. It's possible that I asked, or some of us asked, for Atari to specifically pursue an *Indy* licence."

Although Steven Spielberg was in the process of working on the film, the famous mine car sequence was already the obvious central setpiece. "I read through the script, trying to find elements that would make a fun game," Peter explains. "They were still early in the filming process, so we had the option of getting extra footage shot just for the game. The mine car chase jumped out as an obvious candidate – essentially, it would have been a driving game. Before I started at Atari, in fact, before I started college, I'd hung out a lot at an arcade on the Santa Monica pier. This was pre-*Pong*. In fact, the arcade got one of the first *Computer Space* games that year. I was also racing dirt-bikes in the desert a little bit, and my favourite game in the arcade was a mechanical off-road dune-buggy game, with a car about the size of a slot car on the end of a rod that you steered as it drove on a conveyor belt that had jumps, rocks, and other hazards. So I thought the mine car might be like that, with missing rails where you'd have to tilt back and forth, along with jumps, and with bad guys to whip and attack. It would be similar to *Firefox*, in that there'd be a lot of clips we could switch between, depending on your actions, as well as having overlaid elements on the scene to add more opportunities for interaction."

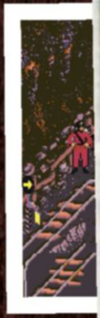


» [Arcade] Players could join the game at their preferred level of difficulty via this start screen.

In hindsight, it seems like a bold plan, an edge-of-the-seat thrill ride through the gloomy bowels of Pankot Palace, with in-game footage possibly shot by Spielberg himself. It wasn't until a visit to George Lucas's mansion headquarters however that the penny dropped. "We had a meeting with Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall and visited ILM in San Raphael to see how we might develop the game," recalls Peter. "That's when we realised that the footage we'd need would be about ten or twenty times as long as what was planned for the film itself, and that our footage would actually need higher production values. A film can "artistically" use darkness and blur, when we needed to show much higher detail to the player during gameplay. So we were talking about a game budget that ▶









» [Arcade] Indy can enter the mine car section at any time… if he can reach it.



» [Arcade] Dynamite and explosive barrels takes out enemies nicely.



» [Arcade] Fire barrels are useful for scorching those pesky Thuggees.

▶ would be probably have been way over $100 million as we envisioned it. That clearly was a dead end… Since System I [Atari's new arcade board] was coming out around then as well, we just moved to it. Similarly, Ed Logg ended up moving *Road Runner*. I loved the laser-disk *Road Runner* and was sorry to see its development switched to System I, and was amazed at how well Ed managed to translate it given the hardware's limitations."

"The mine car mode was developed first," confirms Peter, perhaps explaining how the most attention-grabbing section of *Temple Of Doom* also appears to be the most polished of the gameplay sequences. "I remember spending a lot of time designing the tiles and figuring out how the data structures would need to work so I could fit enough track into the limited memory available. It was pretty shocking how fast the car ate up track; at the speeds we needed the car to travel, it took a lot of tiles to make a track long enough to be fun. I didn't want to do a first-person cart chase. The isometric perspective was used in several games then, and let you use the diagonal length of the monitor to get the longest possible area for gameplay. I wanted you to see the characters, so that's why they come toward you rather than heading away, like *Zaxxon* did."

Temple Of Doom took a similar approach to Atari's earlier *Star Wars* vector release, bringing much of the film's voice-acting and the John Williams' flamboyant score right off the screen and into arcades, although this wasn't quite the case from day one. "I used Rusty Dawe's audio system (RPM) which made it easy for our audio guys to transcript music," says Peter. "This was new for Atari, and a lot of fun music was being made available. The *Charlie Brown* theme from Vince Guaraldi was the initial background music for the mine car chase. It was pretty cool to come by the lab and drive the mine cars to the jazzy little piano tune. It gave it a totally different feel. The whole sound system took a big leap around that era, and having lengthy speech sequences [from Harrison Ford and the other actors] was very cool."

> "Having a bridge swaying, breaking, and falling, was a big design hurdle"
> PETER LIPSON, DIRECTOR

"I don't recall when we settled on having the three types of waves, where you'd drive, get out and free the kids, and then fight through the chamber," says Peter, referring to the cyclic nature of the gameplay. "Mike Hally was my partner on many games at Atari, and he was responsible for most of the playfield layouts, and Dave Ralston also helped out with a playfield or two." The novel difficulty selection screen, featuring Indy strolling through one of three ominous stone doors, was also noteworthy. "The concept of choosing easy, medium or hard was pretty conventional around then," he admits. "I thought the idea of having you select a door to enter, with the closest easiest level accessed by the closest door, was a nice presentation. We took it farther when we did the NES Indy – to reach the hard level; you had to immediately display some mastery of the game to even reach the entrance."

"The other part I liked was that we didn't just end the game even if you had extra lives. We let you play



» [Arcade] The thrilling mine car section is definitely the highlight of the game.



STEVEN SPIELBERG IN VIDEOGAMES

THE DIG



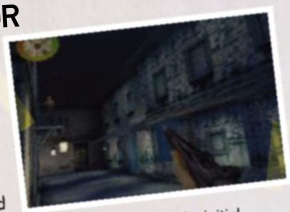
The Dig was a science fiction graphic adventure based on a short story by Spielberg, originally intended for his *Amazing Stories* television series. Despite its somewhat sombre tone, the accomplished movie-like presentation and atmospheric graphics make it one of the more arresting and unique experiences in the LucasArts adventure catalogue.

JURASSIC PARK: TRESPASSER

Inspired by the dino-movie franchise, *Trespasser* was a brave, if flawed attempt at an open-world survival game. Playing as the sole survivor of a plane crash you must make your way to safety across a mysterious island, which heroine Jill (voiced by Minnie Driver) discovers to be Ingen's top secret dinosaur breeding facility.



MEDAL OF HONOR



Probably Spielberg's most famous involvement with gaming came with the debut of this famous WWII first-person shooter franchise on the PlayStation, the idea for which he proposed while *Saving Private Ryan* was in post-production. Despite initial reservations from Dreamworks, the game was a major hit, going on to inspire a certain *Call Of Duty*.

STEVEN SPIELBERG'S DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

An interesting attempt at an educational game/simulation from Spielberg, *Director's Chair* gave players the chance to direct their own movie with input and guidance from the man himself. Along with directing the package includes sections on scriptwriting and editing, and several famous cameos, including the chance to electrocute Quentin Tarantino…





» [Arcade] Once Mola is defeated you'll reach the bonus levels filled with score-boosting Golden Idols.



forever. The 'radioactive' Thuggee [cult member] who occasionally shows up there is a bug. I have no idea how it happened, and we never bothered to track it down. Another fun bit was the way the Thuggees fell as you whipped them, and how the slides came into play. The oddly faked perspective just turned out fun, so we kept it. I think the Escher-like layout of the 'kid' levels is pretty unique. I don't recall the discussion about how the levels would flow, but it was pretty conventional then. The way the levels would alternate and repeat in cycles, with acquisition of a token after each cycle, was popular and I still think it's a nice play pattern. So the Sankara Stones in hindsight seem like an obvious choice to mark your progress."

Indeed, Indy must fight through three different waves of enemies, rescuing kidnapped children, dodging mine car-riding Thuggees, and grabbing a triple fistful of the fabled Sankara before the final showdown with aorta-wrenching head villain, Mola Ram. "The fight on the bridge was a natural climax, and was a fresh bit of gameplay we could use to reward the player who got that far," says Peter. "Hardware limitations, and the limitations imposed by the skills of the programmer, made it challenging to design. It's been so long since I saw it I don't really remember how it plays out! I remember that the idea of having a bridge swaying, breaking, and falling was a big design hurdle."

Alongside the arcade game, Peter was also responsible for the first console version of *Temple Of Doom,* which expanded considerably on the original." The NES version was a whole different story," he exclaims. "Bob Flanagan joined Mike and I in doing it. We had high hopes that we were going to bring a new type of game to Famicom. When we saw the control pad, with all those buttons, we tried to create a gameplay that would exploit them all. So we gave you a bunch of weapons to choose from, and allowed you to go through doors back and forth between a paired mine-train and caged-kid level till you solved them both as a set, and gave you quite complex puzzles to solve, using as small characters as we could to give you a lot of playfield on the screen at once. When we were well underway, *Super Mario* came out, with a character twice the size of ours and very simple controls. Oops... We'd guessed wrong about the direction the Famicom games would take. But I still love our design for that one."



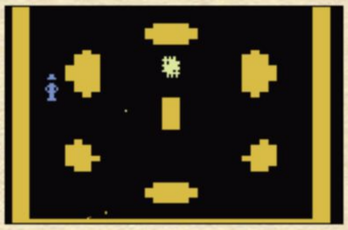
» [Arcade] Indy must retrieve all three Sankara Stones before he can escape to the rope bridge…



» [Arcade] Later rescue missions feature hazardous encounters with Indy-incinerating lava.

MORE ADVENTURES

OTHER INDIANA JONES GAMES TO EXPERIENCE





RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK

■ Indy's first foray into the world of gaming came with this Howard Scott Warshaw-designed Atari VCS movie tie-in. Loosely following the plot of the movie, the game sees players tracking down the Ark of the Covenant in Cairo in the Thirties, and is unusual for using two controllers, one to move and the other to use items.

INDIANA JONES AND THE LOST KINGDOM

■ Released by Mindscape for the Commodore 64, *Lost Kingdom* was the first videogame to use the *Indy* licence without being based on an existing film. Set in a castle in the middle of the jungle, discovered by our hero, it was a rather underwhelming and graphically bland platform-puzzle game.



INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE: THE GRAPHIC ADVENTURE

■ The third game to use LucasArts' famed SCUMM engine recreates the plot of the popular movie with plenty of atmosphere and flair, resulting in a rewarding, if highly challenging, adventure. It's also notable for containing Ron Gilbert's favourite puzzle, when Indy reaches the Grail's inner sanctum (see **RG** issue 110).





INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

■ There are three different videogames based on the *Last Crusade* licence, LucasArts' own action game released alongside its famous graphic adventure, and this NES action game from Software Creations, the closest precursor to *Greatest Adventures*, which mixed adventure and action-platform games.

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS

■ Hal Barwood's superb sequel to the LucasArts' *Last Crusade* graphic adventure proved that it was possible to produce a gripping and immersive story that didn't come from any of the existing movies. Regarded as one of the finest adventure games of all time, even today it's a must-play for Indy fans.



» [SNES] The infamous boulder chase sequence, Mode 7 style.





» [SNES] The movie-like map-transitions are a nice touch.

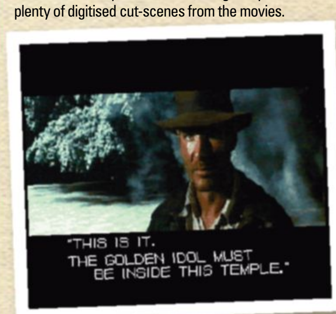
Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures 1994 (Super Nintendo)

Back in the day at LucasArts, around 1992, I was working on *X-Wing* (PC) and *Super Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi* (SNES), as well as writing game designs for new console games I'd wanted to produce," begins Kalani Streicher, designer and producer of *Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures*, and the man given the unenviable task of squeezing three classic Indy movies into a single SNES cartridge. "One of the game design documents I was working on was in expanding the *Indiana Jones* franchise to the console platforms."

Kalani had already garnered critical acclaim as producer of the *Super Star Wars* trilogy, and was keen to bring a similar 2D action-platform aesthetic to another iconic Lucasfilm franchise. "At the CES (Consumer Electronics Show) I bumped into Julian Eggebrecht from Factor 5, who used to work at Rainbow Arts, our distributor and localisation company of our graphic adventure games in Germany," he tells us. "I was a big fan of Factor 5's recent *Turrican* on the SNES [a game which had previously inspired Kalani on *Super Star Wars*.] I remembered being very impressed with the technology, the sheer number of sprites they were able to have on the screen and still have great performance. I asked him if they wanted to develop a game for LucasArts. We sat down and I believe I pitched him several ideas of potential games, though I knew that the *Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures* game would be the best fit and challenge for them. It also helped that he and the team were big fans."

But the once cutting-edge 16-bit Super Nintendo and Sega Mega Drive consoles were coming to the end of their joint reign. "I wanted to do a trilogy similar to the *Super Star Wars* series on the current console platforms, but we were almost at the end of the console cycle and I knew there wasn't enough time to do three games back-to-back each year," Kalani explains. "I also knew that we couldn't only focus on one *Indiana Jones* movie. It wouldn't do the franchise justice. Therefore, if we wanted to include all three *Indiana Jones* movies we would have to pack then into one 'big' cartridge. A 16Mbit cartridge [the same size as *Super Return Of The Jedi*] was the largest we could get at the time."

» [SNES] Like *Super Star Wars*, the game packs in plenty of digitised cut-scenes from the movies.



» [SNES] Indy in some frantic fisticuffs before the tank takes a dive...



So it would amount to three movies and one headache-inducingly massive game. But the chance to put that famous bullwhip in there meant Kalani could more directly channel another of his gaming inspirations. "*Castlevania* was one of my favourite games at the time and I knew as I was designing *Greatest Adventures* that we had to be as good as *Castlevania* using the whip," he reveals. "I don't know how



many times I reiterated to Factor 5 during the Indy production that the *Castlevania* game mechanics was the bar to achieve and more. Factor 5 built the game from scratch, but I'd have to assume that they had underlying technology that they used from *Turrican* for the project."

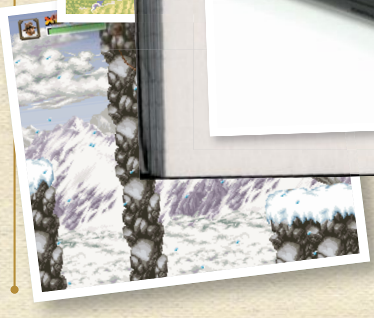
Part *Turrican*, part *Castlevania* is a good way of describing *Greatest Adventures*. Kalani agrees. "Indy is such an iconic figure throughout the movies and I was pretty determined to make him the main hero and give him all the interactions that would make him stand out, he says."There were a lot more puzzle elements in *Indy* than the *Super Star Wars* games; pushing objects to the correct location and using them to get to a specific location or as protection against enemies, collecting objects, climbing, grappling, swinging, overcoming enemies by whipping, shooting or pushing objects into them… I contemplated other characters to be playable, but quickly realised they were too limited and they don't have the action-adventure persona that Indy did. There can only be one Indiana Jones!"

Given the ambition of the project, **RG** is intrigued as to whether there was any guidance from Indy HQ during its development. "We didn't have any specific input from George Lucas or Steven Spielberg," admits Kalani, "but years prior when we were doing *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, the design team had several meetings with them on how to translate Indy's persona from the film to the game. A lot of those conversations still stuck with me and I took it to heart while we were designing and developing Indy."

There were other perks to working at LucasArts though. "I remember combing through all of the original *Indiana Jones* movie miniature models and photographs," remembers Kalani. "I wanted to give the players insight into some of the behind the scenes shots and items. I spent many hours in the photo vault combing through all the material taken on set and during production of the films. It was a tough decision picking the most memorable moments from the movie. I knew that certain iconic moments from the films needed to be in there, such as the boulder chase, mine cart and tank. The plane dogfight, truck chase, motorbike chase and zeppelin section were scenes we had to take out."

Judicious use of Nintendo's custom Mode 7 graphics meant that the vehicle sections were generally impressive, although the most iconic use of the technique came at the end of the very first stage. "*Raiders Of The Lost Ark* is my favourite of the first three movies, and I was very proud of the boulder chase," enthuses Kalani. "Creating this level had its memory challenges – we had many iterations on making the boulder feel big without it getting stuck. I was also very proud of the level design of the Well of Souls.





INDY AND SEGA

■ Somewhat puzzlingly, the Mega Drive (Genesis) version of *Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures* was advertised in magazines but never materialised. Kalani explains what happened. "The Genesis version had been in preliminary production being ported by US Gold in the UK," he discloses, "though several factors prevented the game from being released in the end. LucasArts and US Gold couldn't get to a mutual distribution agreement, US Gold was also at the time going through financial problems, and lastly the Sega Saturn was introduced deteriorating the Sega Genesis market. These were too many obstacles to overcome and didn't instil confidence in the title doing well on that platform in the end. It was too bad, since the game looked pretty darn good on the Genesis."



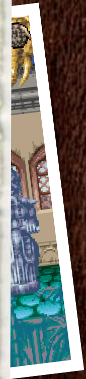
"Iconic moments from the films needed to be in there, such as the boulder chase"

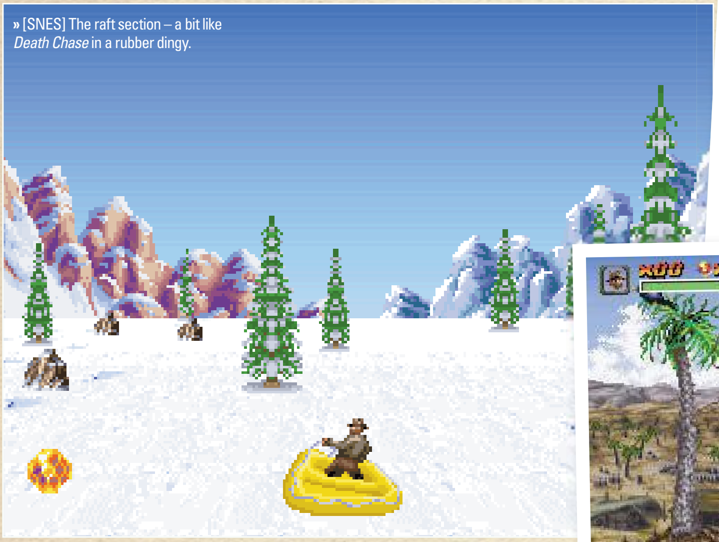
KALANI STREICHER, PRODUCER AND DESIGNER

"It had a nice gameplay variation of platforming challenges and puzzle elements in an interesting maze with secret hidden areas. The rafting level [in the *Temple Of Doom* section] was kind of fun in making it look like you are racing down a snowy mountain. We tried different levels of camera zooms, but then kept it as you see in the game. And of course the mine car ride is one of my favourites. It was one of the levels we tackled first since we knew we had to include it. It was tricky making it look like you are were in a cave riding across lava."

"*The Last Crusade* tank sequence was tricky in keeping Indy on the tank, and the biplane chase was fun and challenging to develop using Mode 7. I tried to keep the levels even between the movies, but in the end some of the *Temple Of Doom* and *Last Crusade* stages we had in the design were too complex and utilised a lot more memory, and had to be cut. I definitely wanted to add many more, if not all, of the memorable scenes in the films. *Lego Indiana Jones* definitely did a great job of it and I enjoyed that game a lot.

"I haven't played *Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures* for a long time, though I'm excited to pull out my old SNES and give it a go again!"





» [SNES] The raft section – a bit like *Death Chase* in a rubber dingy.







» [PC] King Solomon's mines?





» [PC] This time around it's the Russians that are the bane of Indy's life.

Indiana Jones And The Infernal Machine

1999 (PC/Nintendo 64)

From a design point of view, the transition to 3D was easy," says Hal Barwood, who directed Indy's first foray into a genre pioneered by a certain Ms. Lara Croft."Hal, a former Hollywood screenwriter, was well versed in storytelling before his tenure at LucasArts, having co-written the cult fantasy film *Dragonslayer*. After scripting his videogame debut, the acclaimed *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*, he was keen to rework Indy's action-hero roots in a rollicking 3D adventure set in the Cold War era. And though a certain relic-hunting heroine hadn't gone unnoticed, the *Infernal Machine* designers also nodded Eastwards in term of inspiration it seems.

"We had played quite a few 3D games, and we knew we wanted to do action-adventure with a combination of what is now called 'traversal' and fighting," says Hal, "and we were careful to regularise the physical stuff, attainable leaps, and so on. Although there are similarities between Indy and Lara, the game's inspiration, if it came from anywhere outside the *Jones* canon, it was from the Japanese approach to action-adventure, as in *Zelda*."

There was one problem, Core Design had already hit the ground running with its impressive *Tomb Raider* engine, and LucasArts had some catching up to do. "Technically, it was a big challenge because we had no engine at LucasArts capable of doing third person representation," explains Hal. "We thought we'd have to adapt the *Jedi Knight* engine, but we practically rewrote the thing, and we might have been better off starting from scratch or even leasing the *Tomb Raider* engine. Anyway, development was very slow. Our level editor was polygonal, exacting, and annoying, whereas in those days the *Tomb Raider* levels were all built from little cubes, which was speedy by comparison, although visually unsatisfying. We didn't implement quaternions [a mathematical system which enables the speedier calculation of 3D rotations] until the Nintendo port, and the result was a fused spine for Indy and a whip whose segments went crazy. Heroic efforts on the part of Paul LeFevre and his intrepid coders eventually pulled it together, but my hair, already grey, got a lot greyer. I guess at the end we were able to display around 5000 polygons per frame."



» The impressive concept art give a good indication of the grand plans Hal had for his 3D adventure.




» [PC] Indy beneath the ruins of the Tower of Babel.

What was to emerge was by far the most technically impressive *Jones* adventure game yet, as Indy explored, shot, swung and punched his way through a compelling, globe-spanning romp battling gun-toting Soviets, murderous wildlife and various other-worldly creations. One key-note game mechanic, using Indy's whip to swing to otherwise unreachable platforms, was later even pinched back by the guys behind Lara.

Hal is a little self-critical of certain aspects though in hindsight. "Certainly adventuring and puzzling fans were critical to anything with 'Indiana Jones' in the title," he comments, "and likewise some combat seemed essential. When I look back, though, I wonder a bit. The 'Red Menace' wasn't as hellishly evil as the Nazis, and yet on my last playthrough, about a year ago, I smoked something like 200 of those pesky Russki Speznaz. That's a lot… I like the balance, and the game was popular, regardless of whatever ridiculous score the critics gave us. I think we were dinged here and there among the playerati because we dared to combine fighting with platforming. I love both, but many do not."

Likewise Hal admits that the non-PC versions of the game didn't exactly come up to his high standards. "I was known inside the company as a perfectionist, a term that carried significant pejorative weight. So my participation in the [Nintendo 64 and GameBoy] ports was outlawed. Outlawed, that is, until Factor 5 couldn't figure out a decent way to do save-games, so I came back on to do them in the little scripting language we used, reducing their size from around 50K on a PC to 512 bytes on the N64 without much loss of effect. Ultimately I was very disappointed with both ports. The N64 was intended as a 'rental' and was full of bugs. I'm not sure anyone actually completed the game on that system. The GameBoy port was just sub par in every way – it barely connected with the story, the levels were banal, and it was tuned to be insanely difficult. I wonder if anyone ever completed that version either…"

Tellingly though, the superior PC version of *Infernal Machine* even surpasses the excellent *Fate Of Atlantis* in its creator's eyes. "It's still my all-time favourite *Indiana Jones* game," Hal reflects. "I think we set out a whopping good tale for players to unfold, I think the play elements reflect Jones' true essence, and I can't say enough in praise of the level design. I roughed out a bunch of bubble diagrams, and then a very talented group came in and turned them into brilliant and challenging interactive experiences that brought the story to life as a game. Partly because of slow progress on the engine, partly because we knew we were on the hook to keep the Jones banner flying, and partly because we were all proving ourselves, we were able to refine our concepts, iterate them, and polish the game into shape."

One final and rather intriguing side-note is how Hal's original plot for the game was to have taken a tone that would have seemed very familiar to that of Lucasfilm's final *Indy* movie. "By now, and especially after *Crystal Skull*, it is well known that I wanted to do a story that involved Roswell and UFOs full of little grey men," Hal divulges, from which we might infer that that there might have been an eerily similar movie script doing the rounds at the time. "George's people vetoed that one – presumably the word originated with George himself – but after that we were on our own with no interference whatsoever. And you know I like what we wound up doing much better. For a long time after we released the game I could hardly look at it, because it seemed so crude visually. Now, however, it's just retro, and I love it all over again…"





> "We were dinged because we dared to combine fighting with platforming"
> HAL BARWOOD, DIRECTOR


» [PC] A spot of white-water rafting in the Himalayas. Mind that rock Indy…


» [PC] A mysterious door displays the location of the next leg of the quest.

HAL ON SCUMM

■ Hal is still probably best known for *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*, his original graphic adventure game which used LucasArts' pioneering SCUMM system. "*Fate Of Atlantis* was an original idea of mine," he says, "but it fit into an open corporate slot for a 'new *Indiana Jones* adventure'. Without SCUMM it never would have happened. Even more impressive, if LucasArts hadn't developed this cool engine that enabled multiple projects, I would never have gone to work there, and my life would have been very different."

Unfortunately *Fate* would be Hal's only SCUMM project, despite attempts to get the ball rolling on a second *Indy* graphic adventure, *Indiana Jones And The Iron Phoenix*, as well as a *Star Wars*-themed title using the engine. "My regret is, rebellious folks inside LucasArts refused to continue development," he declares sadly, "and the whole adventure game enterprise was severely wounded and bled to death as a result."





FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

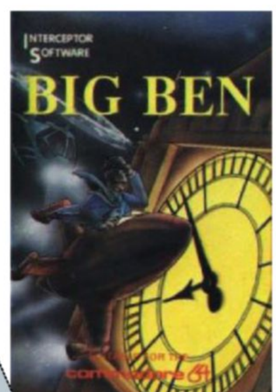
Interceptor Software

He left school at 15 to open a video rental business and was juggling several more companies by the age of 18. Graeme Mason chats to former Interceptor Software owner Richard Jones and some of his key staff at the Hampshire software house

We start this From The Archives with a disturbing revelation. "I have never really been into games," whispers a tanned and relaxed Richard Jones in an accent that oddly mixes Californian twang with his native town of Tadley, Hampshire. As Retro Gamer picks itself up off the floor, he explains further as to how and why he became a videogame publisher. "What I am interested in is technology, media and how it can all develop. And of course, how to make money from it," he smiles. One of the biggest and most popular successes of the late Seventies/early Eighties was the videocassette and Richard, having left school in 1981, was soon proudly opening the first part of what would become an impressive empire: a video rental shop. Another craze, somewhat more short-lived, was CB radio and it was via this medium that he chanced upon someone who would come to play a big influence in his life, despite a brief association.

"Over the radio I met a fellow college student named Jeff Minter, who also lived in Tadley," explains Richard, "and we started talking about computers. Jeff had a ZX80 and encouraged me to buy a ZX81." As the young entrepreneur was keen to discover how such machines were actually constructed, he ordered the kit form of the Sinclair computer and excitedly built the machine alongside his father, Julian. "I wasn't really interested in programming – it seemed like much too hard work," laughs Richard, "but Jeff was very excited because of the ZX81. We started to go to computer shows together as he was working on – along with someone else – a video overlay that switched the ASCII out and piggy-backed another character set." With Jeff providing the necessary programming skills to this endeavour (which essentially gave the ZX81 customisable graphics), the two young men were soon looking at the next range of computers that had appeared on the market. Richard was guided by Jeff; Jeff wanted a Commodore Vic-20. Richard bought one, and the programmer was soon working on a clone of the popular arcade shooter *Defender*.

"We went up to the first Commodore show in London and booked a stand at the Cunard Hotel. Well, I say stand, it was basically a tiny little table with a monitor, the Vic-20 and Jeff's *Defender* game running." grins Richard. The game was entitled *Andes Attack* and was successfully licensed at the show to Jay Balakrishnan of Human Engineered Software (HESware). "That was the birth of Llamasoft," says Richard, "with each of us owning 50 per cent. My role was the financial and promotional sides; Jeff was the programmer."



BY THE NUMBERS

1 Incredibly, the number of cease-and-desist orders Interceptor received, despite their extensive cloning of popular arcade machines

11 years – the age Justin Tolson's was when he wrote *Jupiter Defender* for Interceptor

15 years – the age Richard Jones left school

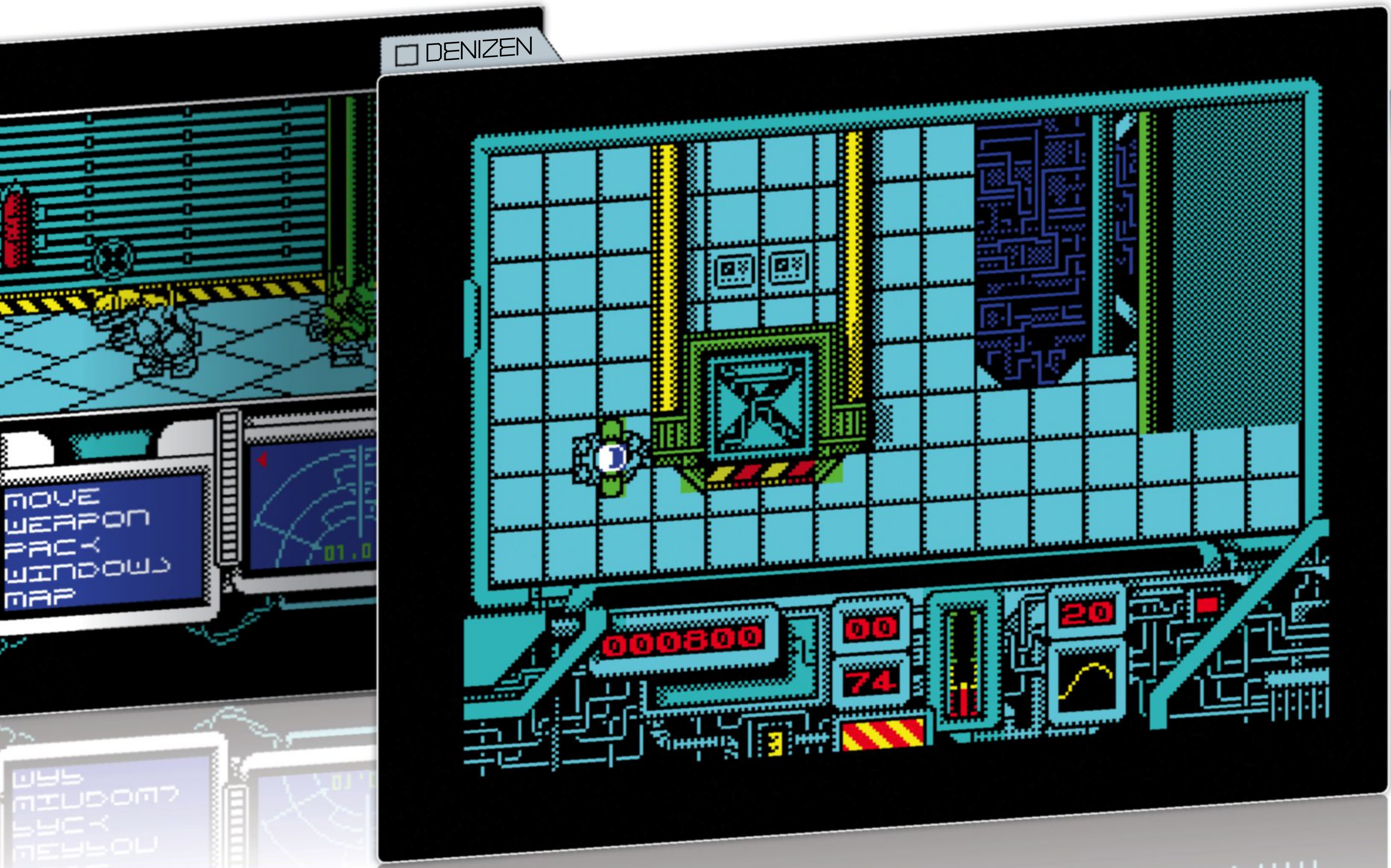
17 Number of games coded for Interceptor and Players by the prolific Ian Gray

81 – the ZX81 was Richard Jones' first computer

100 video tapes, the start of the Jones empire

500 quid, the cost of Interceptor's first magazine advertisement, a full page

30,000 pounds, the cost of Richard Jones' Rolls Royce



DENIZEN

INSTANT EXPERT

Richard Jones and Jeff Minter worked together as Llamasoft partners for around six months before going their separate ways

Thanks to his father's career in the Army, Richard's early life saw him educated in West Germany, Hong Kong and Northern Ireland

Of the early Interceptor Vic-20 games, *Wunda Walter* was considered the best

After developing Interceptor's in-house music system, Andy Severn devised a follow-up cross-platform program which was used in many Codemasters' games as well as in Team17's *Worms*

Sweden-based coder Karl Hornell liked Interceptor's games so much he sent a letter saying so. He got bunch of free games for his trouble and eventually had several of his own games published under the Players label

The load-a-games normally carried the legend "keep tape running" as Interceptor would sometimes have games returned as customers assumed they had bought the wrong game

Two of the more famous load-a-games were *Micro Painter* by Andrew Challis on the C64 and *Pac-Loader* by Andrew Severn, for the Spectrum

The Hampshire-based news show, *Coast to Coast*, broadcast two reports on Richard Jones from 1983 and 1985 with presenter Fred Dinenage dubbing him "a remarkable young man". His co-host was a youthful Fern Britton

Moving apart

It appeared, initially at least, that the new partnership had potential. Richard Jones, thanks to his burgeoning video store business ("I was making a couple of grand a week by then") provided the resources while Jeff Minter did what he did best and began to craft some fine games. It wasn't long, however, before Richard's ambitious nature began to take over. "It wasn't enough that we'd just create and licence the games, I didn't want to farm them out like that. So, we bought a tape machine and began making our own tapes, got a printing company to do our inserts and took them to the distributors ourselves."

Eventually Richard grew restless – the Llamasoft name had begun to attract attention and hopeful coders were regularly offering them games. He saw it as an ideal opportunity to expand. "As a businessman I looked at it and thought, we're making quite a lot of money, but we should be growing and making a lot more. However, Jeff was adamant that he remained the sole programmer for Llamasoft." In addition to the thorny issue of third-party games, the official Llamasoft website cites a dispute over profit-sharing – it was fast becoming clear that the two men were approaching the games industry from two totally diverse viewpoints and would have no choice but to part company. Thus, after a mere six months of working together, Richard Jones and Jeff Minter dissolved their partnership, Richard acquiring the majority of their production and computing equipment with Jeff retaining the software copyrights and ownership of the Llamasoft name. Despite some legal wrangling at the time, history shows it was probably the correct decision for both parties. 1983 – and a new dawn for gaming – approached.

> **"I wasn't really interested in programming – it seemed like much too hard work"**
> RICHARD JONES

After a few months planning, Richard was ready to enter the software industry once more. His first office would be at Tadley's Bakers Yard industrial park, around 1000 square foot of space which was soon home to a mezzanine and a small block of offices. Everything was in place but the name. "I'd just watched the movie *Mad Max*," explains Richard, "and there was this car called an Interceptor, which I thought would be a really cool name." He shortly began advertising for freelance games, with the ultimate aim of acquiring talent to work in-house. First was Ian Gray who would become a prolific coder as Interceptor began publishing many games for the new Commodore 64 computer.

Mining in China

Interceptor's handful of Vic-20 games had been moderately successful; this was eclipsed by Ian Gray's Commodore 64 title, *China Miner*, a platformer with obvious roots that became its first big hit. "It's one of the games I remember most fondly, mainly because it had speech in it. But there's quite a tale attached to that…" mutters Richard, his voice trailing mysteriously away. Perhaps with an element of youthful naiveté that the Interceptor chief was not prone to displaying, Richard had visited Holland to meet up with a young coder who claimed to have written a segment of speech code for the Commodore machine.

Duly impressed, Interceptor inserted the code into *China Miner* after paying out a not-inconsiderable sum. Richard takes up the story: "After the game had been out for about two months, we got a cease-



» [C64] *Clean Up Service* was from the Players Software range, a new budget label that was set up by Interceptor.

PAC-LOADER

Interceptor pioneered the use of "load-a-games", simple games that the player could have fun with while waiting for the main game to load. Andy Severn designed the Spectrum *Pac-loader*, a *Pac-man* clone that ran while *Joe Blade 2* loaded. "It was really tough to get that right as the code needed to consist of incredibly well-timed instructions that would alternately listen for audio pulses from the tape recorder and process the game. It took many, many attempts to get it right," winces Andy. "Then I remember coming in one morning to find my desk strewn with tape from the duplication department after the sound engineer had struggled with another trial that failed to load."

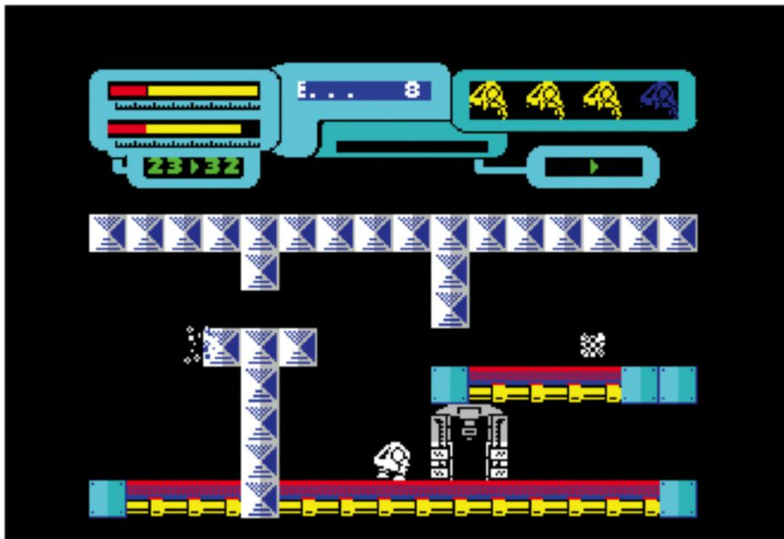


and-desist letter from a company in the United States saying it owned the algorithm – the little swine had ripped us off!" he laughs, able to see the funny side some thirty years later.

Joining Ian Gray in the coding department was Andrew Challis. "I'd bought myself a Vic-20 and realised the real power was in machine code," he remembers, "so I decided to learn it, mainly from a book that explained what each instruction did in a very technical language. Not an easy task for a 14-year-old!" Andrew's initial efforts were a fruit machine simulator entitled *Penny Slot* and an arcade shooter called *VIC Rescue*. Spotting an advert in a magazine for games, he duly despatched his games, thinking that would be the last he heard of it. A week later, the Interceptor boss was sitting opposite him in the Challis family home. Richard remembers the meeting well.

"I was living with my parents, just like Andrew, and drove from Tadley to Camberley on a 50cc motorcycle because I was too young to drive a car!" he laughs. Andrew says: "As you can imagine, I was over the moon. From that point on I worked freelance from home, writing games exclusively for Interceptor." In 1984, Richard offered the self-taught coder a full-time position, which he duly accepted. Once fully ensconced at the software house, Andrew garnered a less exciting, but very important role. "Commodore 64 games in particular took an age to load," he grimaces, "so I devised and wrote the micro load system. One of my jobs was to convert all the games [Interceptor] duplicated to use this system." The micro load system dramatically improved loading speeds and allowed the screen to remain visible, paving the way for Interceptor's famous load-a-games – mini-games you could play while the main title continued to load.

In Interceptor's first 18 months, contrary to most other software houses, Richard was offering a different method of persuading programmers to join him. "Many authors were being paid on royalties, with maybe a small upfront fee," he says, "whereas I always made an upfront offer for the entire rights." It earned Interceptor a reputation for at least ensuring prospective coders knew where they stood and not waiting for royalties that could (and often) would not arrive. As Richard said himself in an interview with *Personal Computer Games* from 1983, "Everyone gets paid what the program is worth. I have never


» [Spectrum] *Anfractuous* was Andy Severn's first game for Interceptor and was heavily influenced by *Starquake*.

"In fifteen minutes, a visitor could get a complete end-to-end picture of how a game was made"

SIMON DANIELS ON INTERCEPTOR'S PRODUCTION LINE

TIMELINE

1982 RICHARD JONES AND JEFF MINTER FORM LLAMASOFT. THE RELATIONSHIP LASTS UNTIL THE AUTUMN – 19 SEPTEMBER TO BE PRECISE, ACCORDING TO THE LLAMASOFT WEBSITE

1983 INTERCEPTOR MICRO'S IS FORMED AND THEIR FIRST FEW EFFORTS FOR THE VIC-20 APPEAR, MAINLY PROGRAMMED BY ANDREW CHALLIS AND IAN GRAY, AND QUICKLY FOLLOWED BY COMMODORE 64 GAMES FROM THE SAME CODERS

1984 INTERCEPTOR MOVES TO THE CALLEVA BUSINESS PARK IN ALDERMASTON. IAN GRAY'S *CHINA MINER* IS A HIT AND PUBLISHES THE FIRST OF SEVERAL IN-HOUSE ADVENTURE GAMES INCLUDING *HEROES OF KARN*

1985 SIMON DANIELS BEGINS (ALMOST) FULL TIME EMPLOYMENT

1986 BUDGET £1.99 LABEL PLAYERS IS CREATED, SHORTLY FOLLOWED BY PLAYERS PREMIER (£2.99)

1987 BROTHERS ANDREW AND MARTIN "JABBA" SEVERN JOIN INTERCEPTOR, WORKING ON PRODUCING GAMES FOR THE PLAYERS AND PLAYER PREMIER LABELS. ALSO, PREMIER PRICE POINT LABEL PANDORA IS CREATED AND ITS FIRST GAME, INTO THE EAGLE'S NEST, IS AN OUTSTANDING SUCCESS

1988 ANDREW CHALLIS, WEARY OF STARING AT A COMPUTER SCREEN ALL DAY, LEAVES TO WORK FOR BRITISH TELECOM

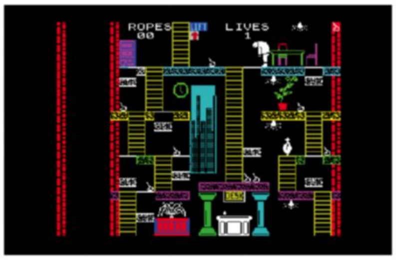
1990 AFTER AN EMOTIONAL MEETING, THE INTERCEPTOR GROUP ENTERS VOLUNTARY ADMINISTRATION

1992 18 MONTHS LATER AND IT'S ALL OVER. INTERCEPTOR'S MANY ASSETS HAVE GONE AND RICHARD JONES HAS MOVED TO AMERICA TO MAKE HIS FORTUNE - ALL OVER AGAIN.

» [C64] Interceptor wasn't the subtlest when it came to imitation.



» [Spectrum] Stephen Curtis' neat platform game, *Plummet*.



ripped anyone off. As you can see…some programmers have given me four games. They have enquired elsewhere but they do not get any more; they may get promises but nothing comes of it." At the age of 17, Richard Jones already possessed a sharp mind for business.

A Growing Empire

As Interceptor continued to grow, Richard needed help to oversee his staff. Fortunately his father was just about to have some free time. "My father was an assistant sergeant major in the army and I reasoned that if we're going to grow as I wanted then I needed him to rein in the staff," says Richard, who subsequently gave his father half of the business and Julian Jones proved a valuable asset to Interceptor as the company eventually swelled to over 70 employees.

Richard meantime began to concentrate on expanding the Interceptor empire; in addition to the tape duplication, he added a full design studio, printing operation and even a plastic cassette box business (The Compact Case Company) which pioneered a new "double case" design that was sold not just to software houses, but also to the music industry, primarily for compilations. The younger Jones became the face of the company, appearing in local news bulletins and papers, as well as assorted computer magazines; yet despite this attention, Richard remained focused on business.

"I never partied, and this might sound odd, but I'm 47 now and I've never even drunk alcohol or smoked in my life." There was to be no crazy, out-of-control fast cars and crazy adventures lifestyle story here. "I was too nerdy and my focus was on making something out of nothing," says Richard, without a hint of regret, although a documentary from 1985 contradicts this slightly as the Interceptor boss shows up for work in a luxurious Rolls Royce. "Our accountant told us we'd get a tax break!"

In 1985, with half an eye on constantly expanding their business empire, the Jones' recruited Simon Daniels to assist in product management. Simon's role would be critical as he became Interceptor's quality control, testing the games and meeting with the programmers over potential concepts. By now Interceptor's growth had necessitated a move to Calleva Park in the nearby Aldermaston and Simon began working there part-time while still at school, initially in its packing department. Says Simon: "Over time I started play-testing games and writing reviews of the games that had been submitted for evaluation by independent programmers. I continued working part time for a couple of years and then, after a year at Basingstoke Technical College, dropped out to work four days a week so I could continue at college on a day release basis." Richard, perhaps surprisingly, put a lot of faith in his new development manager.

"We gave a lot of licence to the teams and programmers as they had their finger on the pulse as to what the latest trends were," he explains, "and Simon was instrumental as he did the game testing. He would also co-ordinate with the art department the ideas for the packaging and generally hover around making sure everything got out on time." A role Simon greatly enjoyed was showing visitors around the Interceptor factory and offices. "We'd start with the programmers, move to the art studio, the print shop, tape mastering room, tape duplication machines and the packing room," he says. "In fifteen minutes, a visitor could get a complete end-to-end picture of how a game was made."

On A Budget

Simon's official title was software co-ordinator for a new label that was intended to break into the expanding budget market. "Players came about because we had a mid-price point and we felt the need for another level," reveals Richard. Interceptor's in-house design studio was to be responsible for the look of the new range and was led by Mike Wood. "Mike was a great graphic designer and I told him I wanted a nice clean image to promote Players. I thought the design to the range was wonderful and a master class in packaging and marketing." In addition to re-releasing some of Interceptor's older games, Players would grow into an expansive line, publishing more games on the Spectrum and Amstrad than it had before. And if you ever noticed how the range seemed to produce so many violent games, this was actually by design, as Simon explains.

"When Codemasters launched, it committed itself to producing non-violent games. Players and Players Premier – under my influence – went the other way. The more excessive and over-the-top weaponry the better and I'd often have a programmer replace the spaceship in a submitted game with an F14 or attack helicopter, or replace a robot with a mercenary," he says gleefully, "and this provided a way for us to create more interesting artwork that separated us from the rest." The Players labels also drew ▶

☐ WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Richard Jones:
With his father overseeing the gradual disassembly of Interceptor, Richard Jones emigrated to the United States to seek his fortune once more.

Julian Jones
Julian remained at Interceptor while the company was under administration, overseeing the gradual sale of its various assets. When it finally ceased trading he began a successful garden nursery business, which he still runs today.



Simon Daniels
Since 1997 Simon has worked at Microsoft in its Typography department. He currently manages a small group that creates, licences and maintains Microsoft's international font library and assists the marketing teams.

Andrew Challis
After four years, Andrew decided he'd had enough of coding and joined BT. "I felt [coding] was making me introverted and unsociable so I wanted to do something more hands-on and physical." he says.

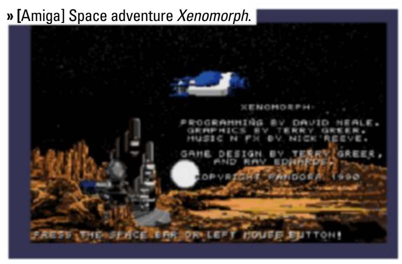
Chris Johnson
Chris worked at a number of other developers during the Nineties before switching to mobile phone gaming in 2000. Today he is a lead producer at Zynga.

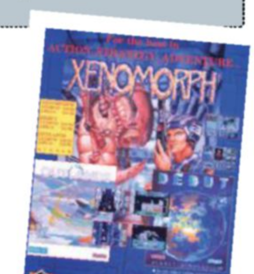
Karl Hornell
Like Chris, Karl works in mobile gaming as an iOS developer.



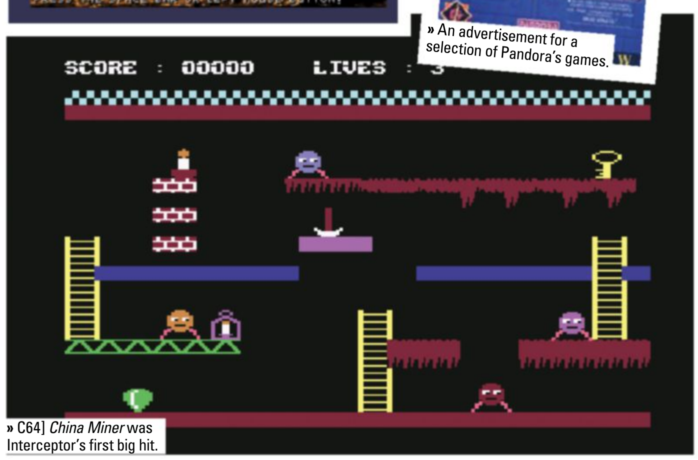
Andy Severn
After 25 years in the industry, working with famous companies such as Team 17, Codemasters and Rebellion, Andy finally left the games industry in 2010 and now runs his own company, Oxford eBooks, while also designing websites as well – "because I still love coding!"

» [Amiga] Space adventure *Xenomorph*.



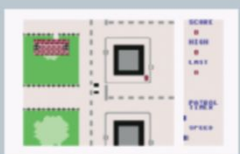


» An advertisement for a selection of Pandora's games.



» C64] *China Miner* was Interceptor's first big hit.

SIX OF THE BEST



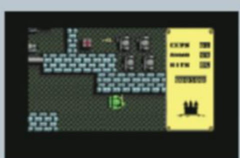
Siren City (1983)
Hailed by many as a pre-cursor to *Grand Theft Auto*, *Siren City* was a rare early Interceptor title *not* unofficially based on an arcade game and was coded by the prolific Ian Gray. Using a top down view, the player patrolled the streets, chasing crooks.



Heroes Of Karn (1984)
Interceptor turned to adventure games with this slick if stereotypical swords and sorcery tale that owed a debt to Melbourne House's *The Hobbit*. The original version on the Commodore 64 included music and an 18-minute loading time.



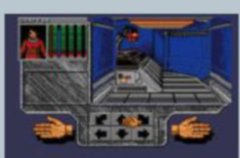
Joe Blade (1987)
Colin Swinbourne's debut game was a neat and playable flick-screen run-and-gunner that became a big seller. A simple concept, with fun graphics and an odd sense of humour, the addition of an entertaining mini-game made *Joe Blade* great value.



Into The Eagle's Nest (1987)
Premium label Pandora got off to a cracking start with this rip-roaring WWII *Gauntlet* clone. Set within the eponymous castle, *Eagle's Nest* was far from original yet was huge fun as you wandered around shooting Nazi soldiers and "reacquiring" treasures.



Début (1990)
Brian Leake and Mark Davidson's 16-bit game didn't lack ambition even if their high concepts and plans meant its release was severely delayed. In two distinct halves, the player had to first construct the planet before helping to maintain its resources.

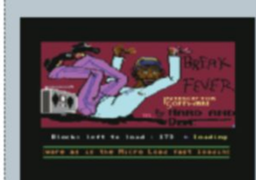


Xenomorph (1990)
With the player, in essence, an outer space delivery man, *Xenomorph* took this mundane role and turned it into an impressive first-person space adventure on a mysterious mining station, with great atmosphere and action RPG gameplay.

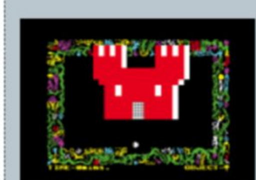
ONE TO AVOID



The Token Of Ghall (1983)
Interceptor published many great adventure games but this was not one of them. Its blocky, crude graphics were a far cry from the beauty that Robin Chapman and Terry Greer would be creating within a year and the game itself was slow and frustrating.



Break Fever (1984)
Oh dear. A strange dance fad that lasted a fleeting moment and is a bit embarrassing to look back on, and this is one of several games that it inspired. The graphics and sound were acceptable, but playing *Break Fever* was less fun than sniffing a sweaty luminous yellow pop sock.



Cagara (1986)
By 1986, basing a Spectrum game on an old Atari 2600 title was not a good idea. This didn't stop Players, who released this maze game that was heavily inspired by the Atari classic *Adventure*, (check out our Making Of *Adventure* on page 72!) and wasn't much of an improvement.



» [C64] Pandora was another software label that was set up by Interceptor.

heavily on popular culture, most obviously violent movies of the Eighties such as *Commando*, *Platoon*, *Aliens* and *Conan The Barbarian*. As such, the majority of its games were banned in Germany where tighter software controls were in place at the time.

With the Players range in full swing, even more programmers began to arrive at Interceptor. In May of 1987, Chris Johnson and brothers Martin and Andy Severn were the latest recruits. "My first role [at Interceptor] was to make a tape master for a game," remembers Andy, "which I'd never done before! I quickly worked it out before starting regularly as a programmer." Andy continued to work in the duplication department, creating masters for the various games that Interceptor duplicated for other companies. His tasks often involved writing code that would generate the loading signals to be recorded to tape; as technology progressed he did a similar job for its "amazing disc duplication plant" that consisted of rows and rows of floppy disc hoppers.

"I'd devise the various disc protection schemes that the system would be able to write, but would be uncopyable on a standard consumer disc drive," he says. Ultimately, however, Andy Severn's most consistent contribution to Players would be music. He is credited in the vast majority of its Spectrum and Amstrad games thanks to an interest in computer-generated music that led to the creation of his Interceptor Music System for the AY Chip.

To go hand in hand with Players would be a premium price point range. "Although Interceptor was an old and established name," says Richard, "it was getting tired and with having all the facilities in place, it made us very open to new lines." The new label was called Pandora and it got off to a successful start on the eight-bit computers with the wartime *Gauntlet*-clone *Into The Eagle's Nest*. But it was on the fast-incoming 16-bit machines that its future seemingly lay; 3D RPG adventure

MAKING THEIR DÉBUT



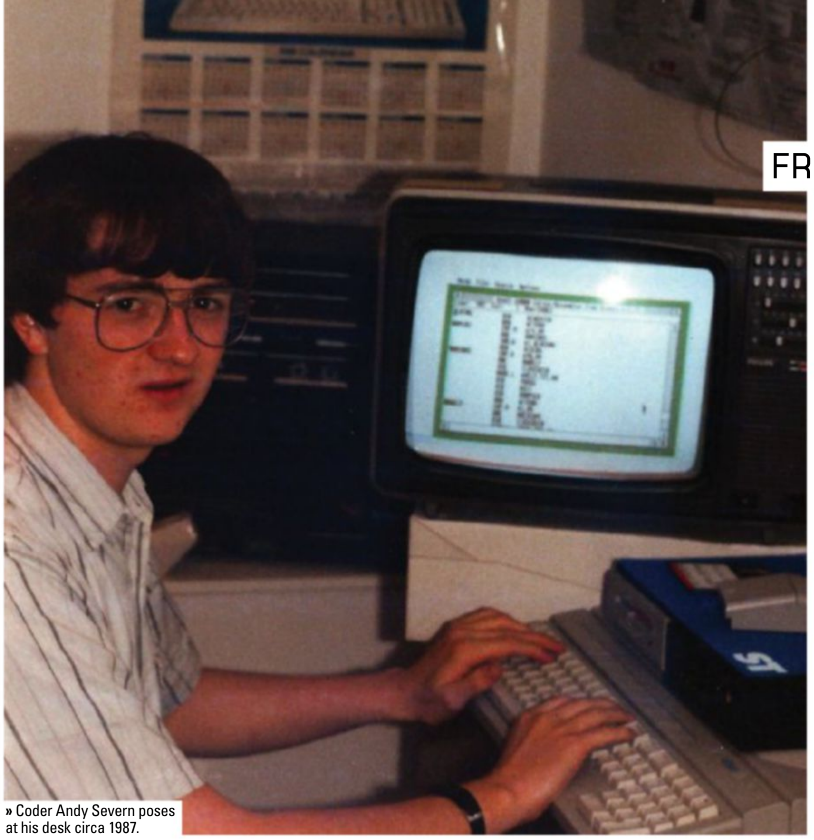
"We'd been working on some concepts for a little while, had settled on the design and were starting on the game – but needed to find a way to be able to fund it through to completion," says Brian Leake, co-creator of the epic planet simulation, *Début*. Along with his friend Mark Davidson, Brian had been impressed with the processing power of the 16-bit computers which lent itself to heavy simulations. "And what better than trying to simulate an entire planet's ecosystem?" The coders presented the game to Interceptor with Richard Jones seeking approval from his programmers and designers. Says Brian: "[Interceptor] weren't like the other software houses of the time; there was something scrappy and energetic about them. They pretty much left us to our own devices." We hope to bring the full story of *Début* to a future issue.

Xenomorph was a particular favourite on the Amiga, and Richard briefly flirted with licensing it to Activision for its impending *Aliens* game. Delays with *Xenomorph* put paid to what could have been an interesting arrangement.

Changing Times

But with the advent of the 16-bits came bigger development teams, longer lead times and an unpleasant surprise. "One year, I think it was 1989, we made a big loss, which came as a bit of a shock considering we'd always made money on the publishing side," says Richard sadly, "and this was because we'd suddenly gone from simple games where one man did everything from start to finish, to huge games with teams of artists and musicians, in addition to three or four coders." With the 8-bit software market contracting fast (even on the budget side) and Interceptor's other interests, such as the duplication plant and design studio effectively holding up the publishing arm, Richard felt a decision

> **"We'd always made huge profits and then suddenly one year we lost £600,000"**
>
> RICHARD JONES ON THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR INTERCEPTOR



» Coder Andy Severn poses at his desk circa 1987.

A NUCLEAR NEIGHBOUR

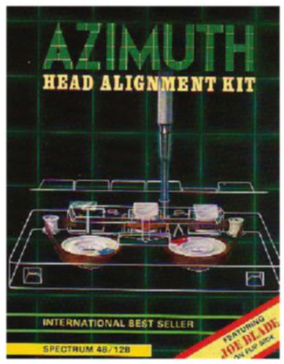
Once the dust had settled post-WWII, Britain quickly decided it should begin its own nuclear weapon program. After a considerable search for a home, the Atomic Weapon Research Establishment (AWRE, latterly AWE) was finally opened at Aldermaston Airfield on 1 April 1950. Hundreds of specialist staff from around the country were recruited and relocated to the site; between 1951 and 1960, 2000 houses were built with over 1000 of them in the Tadley area alone. By 1952 the main warhead construction facility was completed together with a radioactive effluent processing plant and health physics block. The AWRE's main role was testing, with several nuclear trials throughout the Fifties, mainly at Maralinga (in the Australian desert) and on Christmas Island in the Pacific Ocean, before an agreement with the United States provided Britain with use of its Nevada Desert site. In total, Britain conducted 46 varying nuclear tests with the final one held on 26 November 1991. Five years later the world's nuclear powers agreed to a ban on testing their devices and AWRE's main role became providing and supporting the warheads for the Trident weapons system. Today, they provide a vital role in the de-commissioning of Britain's nuclear weapons while maintaining the capability to design and construct them – should the need ever arise.

needed to be made. "We'd always made huge profits and then suddenly one year we lost £600,000. We took a took breath, thought hard about where the industry was going and our position in it. If we didn't think we could turn things around within a year, it was time to get out."

Early in 1990 the fateful meeting was held. "We'd built up a monster, a huge animal," evokes Richard, "and it needed feeding. But we simply didn't have the required revenue stream." Voluntary receivership was the decision reached. "I remember sitting down and filling in a document that gave permission to hand over the company to a third party. I did it on an Atari computer, printed it out, signed it and that was that. I lost all my power as a director and basically became an employee." As the receiver moved in and begun to sell off Interceptor's not-inconsiderable assets, Richard began to find life around Tadley a little difficult. "Everybody around town knew who I was. I'd been driving around in a convertible Mercedes. That went, but it still didn't feel right; I had to get out." At the age of just 26, Richard Jones had built an empire, expanded into property, satellite equipment and printing, owned multiple factories and employed over 70 people. Now it was time to start again. "My father continued to run the company while it was in administration. Meantime, I'd visited the United States several times already and saw an opportunity in the new multimedia industry, which eventually turned into the dot.com revolution. I moved from riding the crest of one huge wave to another."

Bleak Software House

Software development manager Simon Daniels also recalls the beginning of the end for Interceptor. "Around 1989 things were starting to look bleak. My ability to licence, schedule and release games was being severely hit by the situation. And the games were not selling well," he remembers painfully. Yet there was still life from this difficult situation as Andy Severn tells us: "When the company went into receivership a few of us hung around to help carry things



» The Azimuth tape kit was handy for fine-tuning pesky tape-heads.

» The Players label was bright and colourful.

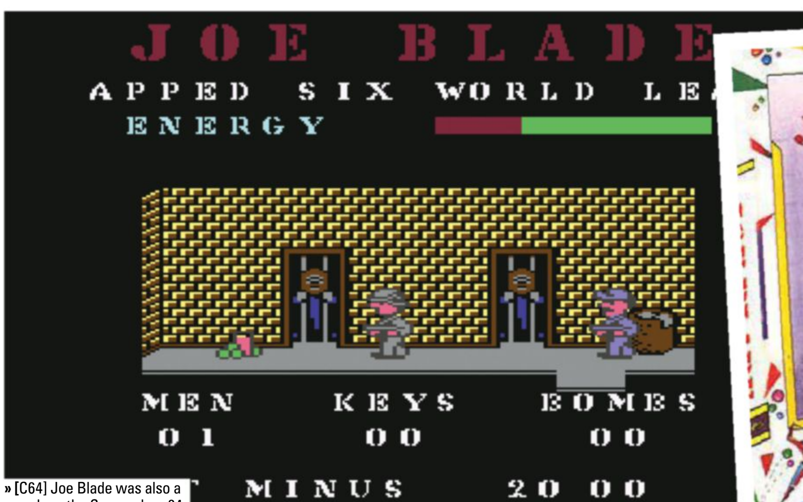
through. Julian Jones kindly lent a handful of us one of the office units to help set up our own company called Synergy. In return we gave them back favourable development fees and the odd piece of technical help."

We conclude by asking how those involved look back on their time at Interceptor. "Happy, happy days," continues Andy, "when we earned great money, worked hard and played hard. Back then it seemed like it was actually fun to work all night, eat a Chinese takeaway over your keyboard and then sleep under your desk!" Simon Daniels, who left in 1990 to join a nearby distributor says: "It was great fun and a fantastic learning opportunity. I'm glad I left when I did however. I think it was a shame the company wasn't able to adapt to the changing environment – or didn't have the chance to," he ponders.

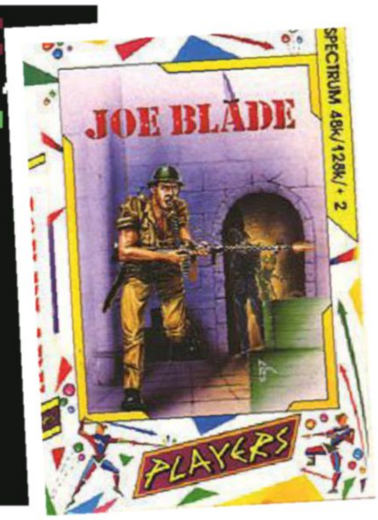
But we leave the final words to the "17-year-old whizz kid", in the words of *Personal Computer Gamer* magazine. "It all happened so quickly and it was like a little cottage industry. Although I wasn't a gamer, I had great teams and we gave them a lot of licence as they had their finger on the pulse as to what the latest trends were. Simon was instrumental as one of the team leaders but the programmers were the lifeblood. Maybe we had lost a bit of focus on the publishing side by the end; it had mushroomed from that cottage industry into a big international business.

"Once the big guys, the multinationals, got involved, the cost for development went through the roof and it became a crapshoot. But we were a team: many of the guys were brilliant programmers, but very nerdy, almost anti-social. Yet that didn't matter with us – you were part of the crew and you turned up and made games. Simple as that."

Our special thanks to Richard Jones, Simon Daniels and Andy Severn.



» [C64] Joe Blade was also a smash on the Commodore 64.



RETROREVIVAL

Marvel Land

A RIDE YOU WON'T HAVE TO QUEUE FOR



» MEGA DRIVE
» TOSE/NAMCO
» 1991

You'd be hard pressed to find a game that looks and plays more like a 16-bit platformer than the Mega Drive conversion of Namco's *Marvel Land* coin-op, or *Talmit's Adventure* as it was known on the system in Europe. This is largely thanks to its vibrant setting: the eponymous Marvel Land, a colourful and inviting fantasy amusement park world that, as you might expect, is a perfect setting for the genre. Indeed, given how entertaining theme parks can be, there is much you can do here, and *Marvel Land* doesn't squander this potential – with stages featuring a rollercoaster, and even something that reminds me of one of those pendulous pirate ship-style rides.

The story of *Marvel Land* is a bit on the bonkers side though, as most platformer premises so often tend to be. But this one is certainly up there with the more peculiar we've come across, telling the tale of a regal looking mole who takes over *Marvel Land* from a bunch of fairies, imprisoning them and their princess inside crystal balls. You play a brave and somewhat effeminate looking prince named Talmit, who does what any self-respecting prince with big doe eyes and wild hair would do in such a situation – goes on a run and jump spree, rescuing said fairies and princess and whacking that mean mole.

What I always enjoyed most about *Marvel Land* was the graphics, level design and its testing difficulty. It was a platformer I would always return to, as its world had this neat sense of depth and variety that never made a return boring. It was a tough and large game to beat. Though it might look like a cutesy platformer firmly aimed at kids, the action could be pretty gruelling (one hit spelled death for Talmit, and the power-ups were incredibly useful, to the point where you really felt underpowered without them). Progression was also non-linear, with the game pacing you back to previous screen if you took a wrong, or plonking you in an entirely different area.

Though it's easy for *Marvel Land* to get lost amongst the huge wave of platformers that appeared around the time of its release, if you're a fan of the genre I would urge you to check out this great arcade conversion. *

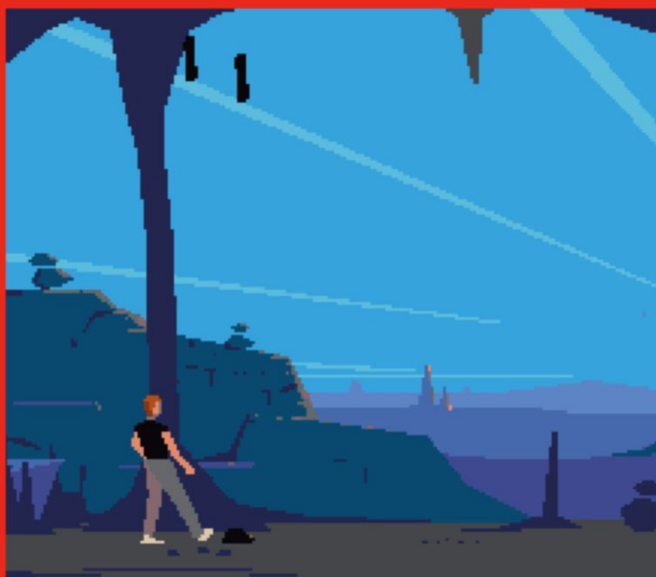




Minority Report

We've had several letters asking for Mega-CD coverage recently. So many, in fact, that Darran decided to once again play through some of the finest games that the ill-fated add-on had to offer…





» [Mega-CD] You can't hear it here obviously, but the new score is incredibly atmospheric.

HEART OF THE ALIEN

■ DEVELOPER: INTERPLAY ■ YEAR: 1994

■ Eric Chahi's *Another World* was an incredibly popular game upon its release, eventually getting ported to countless console and home computers at the time. In fact it's still getting remastered and re-released today, with new PC and iOS and an impressive homebrew Jaguar effort being the most recent examples, though we're sure they won't be the last. It's rather amazing then that after all its success, Interplay decided that its sequel would be released on just a single console, and a console add-on at that. It seems an astonishingly backwards decision for a game that sold over a million copies during the Nineties, but that's what happened, which is handy in a way, as it makes for a delightful (if rather unpolished) gem with which to open our article.

What's interesting about *Heart Of The Alien* is that it's actually two games in one, as it also includes Eric Chahi's original award-winning game in addition to the exclusive sequel. It's an excellent port as well; and while it doesn't offer any new FMV intros or enhanced visuals over the Mega Drive version, it does feature a brand new soundtrack by Jean-Francois Freitas. Eric was directly involved in the new soundtrack and his assistance is easily noticeable, with the soothing music doing a far greater job of matching the onscreen action, making the game feel far more cinematic as a result.

Sadly, *Heart Of The Alien* isn't quite up to the same standards as *Another World*, possibly due to Eric not having as much involvement as he did on the original game. The pacing isn't quite as



» BATMAN RETURNS

■ DEVELOPER: MALIBU ■ YEAR: 1993

■ **This enhanced Mega** Drive port by Malibu is a game of two halves. It features all the platforming sections found in the original Mega Drive game, meaning it's a tough platformer with rather ugly visuals. Stick with it though and you're rewarded with some fantastic driving sections that boast stunning visuals and some supremely impressive sprite-scaling effects. Jeff Godfrey, James Maxwell and John O'Brien do a fantastic job with these fast-paced action sequences, and it's something of a shame that Malibu decided not to take the entire game down this more exciting route. The icing on the cake is a great new rearranged soundtrack by Spencer Nilson.



» ROAD AVENGER

■ DEVELOPER: WOLFTEAM ■ YEAR: 1993

■ **There are lots** of FMV games on Sega's Mega-CD, but this hilarious effort from 1993 remains one of our favourites. Coded by Wolfteam, it's actually a port of Data East's *Road Blaster*, which was first released in arcades in 1985. Like many FMV-based games, the actual gameplay is fairly limited, displaying on-rails sections and giving you *Dragon's Lair*-style prompts that you must continue in order to finish each stage. While the gameplay is obviously limited, the cheesy rock soundtrack, exciting backdrop – you're racing street gangs whiles seeking revenge for your dead girlfriend – and relatively snappy pace is what makes it so much fun to play.



» SNATCHER

■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI ■ YEAR: 1994

■ ***Snatcher* arrived quite** late on the Mega-CD and had already appeared on previous machines including the MSX2 and the PC Engine's Super CD-ROM. Despite this it's widely considered to be the best version by most gamers, as it's the only one to receive an actual English localisation. Boasting a solid translation of the PC Engine version, *Snatcher* works thanks to its distinctive comic book style, strong voice acting and a cracking story that pays homage to everything from *The Terminator* to *Blade Runner*. The only real downside is that incredibly poor sales mean that both the US and UK versions are hard to find at a good price.

» [Mega CD] Everyone is out for your blood, so shoot first.



» [Mega-CD] Will Lester survive? You need to play the game to find out.



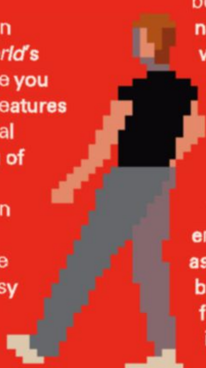


» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- The original Mega-CD system sat alongside the Mega Drive. The revised version eventually sat underneath the Mega Drive II.
- The machine's FMV games are often dismissed, but there are plenty of hidden gems on the system from more traditional genres.
- Collectors like to go for the Wonder Mega and the Multi-Meg, sleek units that combine both systems in a tasty package.

strong and the animation, while good, isn't up to the same high standard as the original. There's no denying that it's an equally ambitious game however, with Eric giving the team plenty of cool ideas that weren't always well executed in the final game.

Heart Of The Alien follows on immediately from *Another World's* cliffhanger ending, but this time you play as Lester's alien friend. It features a similar structure to the original game, with sections consisting of puzzle and platform elements, but it's a lot more difficult; often relying on trial and error to get through certain sections. Unlike the original game it's all too easy to die without realising what happened, and frustration quickly sets in.



And yet there's a pull to *Heart Of The Alien* that makes it hard to ignore. It's not as polished as the original game, but there are still plenty of nice little touches to be found. One example is the whip that doubles as both a weapon and a way of navigating bigger chasms, while another is using environmental hazards to kill certain foes. Even a little tweaking of the difficulty would have made a world of difference. *Heart Of The Alien* isn't perfect – the ending is likely to infuriate as many fans as it thrills – but it does a good job of finishing off Another World's imaginative story that it deserves to be experienced.



[Mega-CD] Death comes often in *Heart Of The Alien*, so be careful.



» ETERNAL CHAMPIONS: CHALLENGE FROM THE DARKSIDE

■ DEVELOPER: SEGA INTERACTIVE DEVELOPMENT DIVISION ■ YEAR: 1995

■ **One of the** downsides of the Mega-CD is that it suffers from a lot of quick Mega Drive ports. Sega really pushed the boat out for *Challenge From The Darkside* however, and in many ways it's more a full-on sequel. Featuring all nine fighters from the original game, it also introduces 13 new competitors. Cine-Kills are another fun addition, being funky FMV-based fatalities that often look unintentionally hilarious. Add in gameplay enhancements like Overkills and Vendettas, greatly enhanced visuals and slicker animation, and this becomes a must-buy.



» ROBO ALESTE

■ DEVELOPER: COMPILE LTD ■ YEAR: 1992

■ **There aren't many** shoot-'em-ups on the Mega-CD, but most of them are absolute belters. *Robo Aleste* is by far the best of the lot, building on the groundwork laid out by its excellent Mega Drive predecessor, *Musha Aleste*. The setting is brilliant, taking place in an alternative version of feudal Japan where the natives control giant flying mechs. It's the cleverly designed enemy waves, distinct power-up system, brilliant graphics and thumping soundtrack that really makes *Robo Aleste* stand apart from its peers, creating a savage frenetic blaster that puts it up there with the best of the 16-bit shooters. A further example of Compile's brilliance within the genre.



» LUNAR: THE SILVER STAR

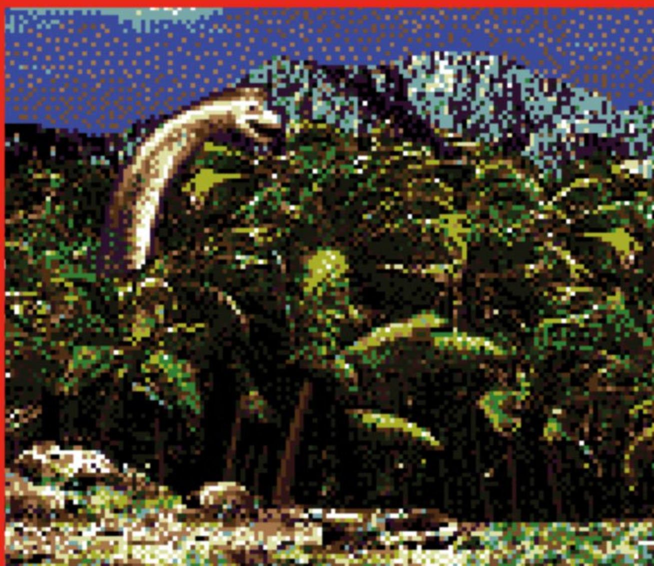
■ DEVELOPER: STUDIO ALEX, GAME ARTS ■ YEAR: 1992

■ **There are plenty** of great RPGs on the Mega-CD, and many of them received Western localisations. *Lunar: The Silver Star* is the Mega-CD's answer to *Final Fantasy*, and bloody good it is too. The main visuals are heavily typical of the 16-bit sprites used at the time, but it comes alive thanks to a gripping story, robust combat, some truly beautiful cutscenes and a stellar soundtrack courtesy of Noriyuki Iwadare. Like many RPGs from the era, the game's Western localisation was handled by Working Designs, meaning it's excellently translated and features great voice acting. A follow-up, *Lunar: Eternal Blue,* is also available on the system.

Minority Report

JURASSIC PARK

■ DEVELOPER: SEGA OF AMERICA ■ YEAR: 1993



» [Mega-CD] An excellent point-and-click adventure with inventive use of FMV.

■ Sega pulled out all the stops for *Jurassic Park*, going so far as to send developers and a steadicam unit all the way to Hawaii to film footage for its game. Amazingly, despite being there for several weeks, hardly any of the footage was used, meaning the end product was vastly different to the heavily FMV-based games that were dominant on Sega's system at the time.

Rather than go down the action route like it had with its Mega Drive game, *Jurassic Park* on the Mega-CD took the form of a rather impressive point-and-click adventure. Many of the locations from the film are revisited, while the digitised graphics do a great job of capturing the ambience of the island. Of course, FMV footage was still prevalent throughout the game, but it genuinely enhances the atmosphere thanks to links to key scientists and a handy palaeontologist who routinely pops up to offer advice on the many dinosaurs to be found.

While *Jurassic Park* is an adventure game first and foremost, Sega did add a few arcade elements to the game, so there are several occasions where you'll have to take out attacking dinosaurs with your handy tranquiliser gun. The sections are very well paced, nicely juxtaposing with the otherwise leisurely exploration of the huge island. Exceptionally atmospheric and with a strong story – revolving around the collection of precious dinosaur eggs – *Jurassic Park* is a Mega-CD release that's well worth investigating, regardless of whether you're a fan of the series or not.

» SONIC CD

■ DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM ■ YEAR: 1993

■ Sonic's Mega-CD debut boasted a stunning soundtrack, imaginative level design and a clever new time travel mechanic. Little wonder many consider it to be the best game in the series.



» KEIO FLYING SQUADRON

■ DEVELOPER: JVC ■ YEAR: 1993

■ A delightful *Parodius*-style side-scrolling shooter that features gorgeous cutscenes and a girl with rabbit ears who flies on a dragon. Filled with tight enemy waves and fun bosses, it's an enjoyable shooter.





» FINAL FIGHT CD

■ DEVELOPER: SEGA ■ YEAR: 1993

■ **Outside of the** stunning Sharp X68000 version, this was easily the best home version of *Final Fight*. Unlike the SNES version, it features every single level from the original arcade game. Guy is fully playable, it caters for two players and all three characters are selectable. Other enhancements include new speech, a funky remix of the original soundtrack and a brand new Time Attack mode that makes the fighting even more frantic. There aren't as many sprites to fight onscreen compared to the original arcade game, and it has the same censorship issues as previous Western versions, but it's a small price to pay for the system's best scrolling fighter.



» ANETT FUTATABI

■ DEVELOPER: WOLFTEAM ■ YEAR: 1993

■ ***Anett Futatabi* is** actually a sequel to Wolfteam's El Viento, a platformer that had appeared on the Mega Drive two years earlier. Wolfteam went in a completely different direction for the sequel however, turning into a slick *Double Dragon* clone, much to the chagrin of some fans. Get past this and you'll discover that *Anett Futatabi* is actually very good, with plenty of meaty action and a variety of well-animated scum to knock into next week. It obviously borrows rather heavily from the likes of *Final Fight* and *Streets Of Rage*, but it stands apart from them thanks to its excellent cutscenes and brilliant soundtrack.



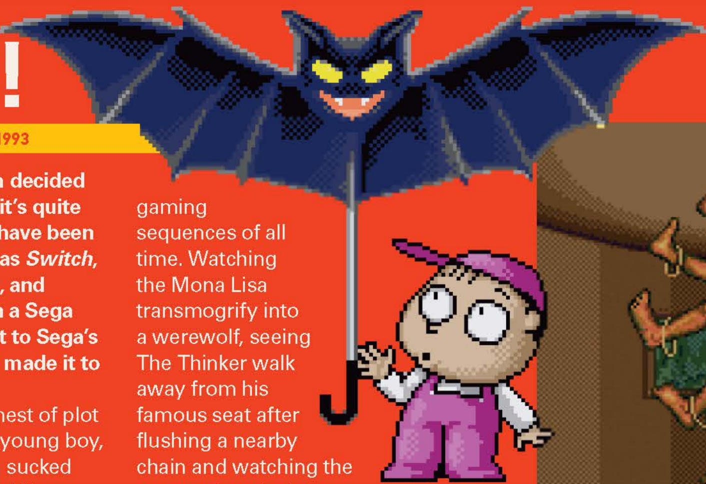
» SHINING FORCE CD

■ DEVELOPER: SONIC! SOFTWARE PLANNING ■ YEAR: 1994

■ **This isn't a** new *Shining Force* game, being a remake of the Game Gear's *Shining Force Gaiden I* and *II. Gaiden* was confined to Japan though, meaning this was the first opportunity for fans of the series to experience an English localised version. It's a great RPG as well, divided into several acts and featuring enhanced graphics and a truly glorious soundtrack. The omission of the village where you could buy items and interact with villagers is a curious choice – you simply buy what you need from a shop – but we feel this works in *Shining Force CD*'s favour, allowing you to simply focus on the gritty strategic battles.

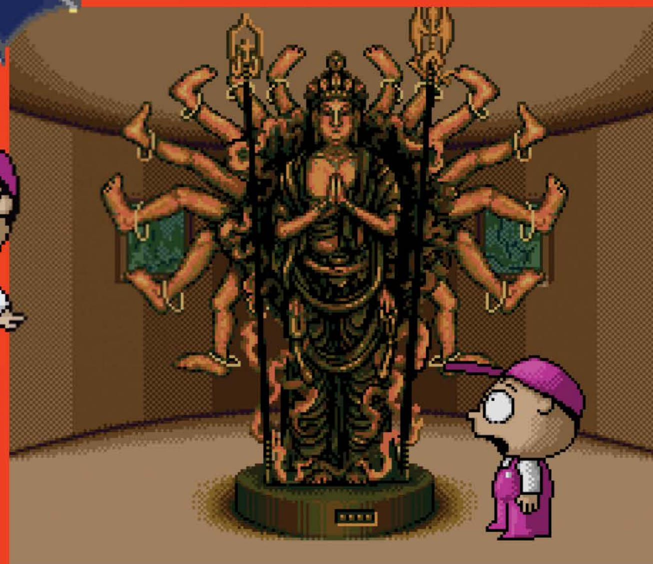
PANIC!

■ DEVELOPER: SEGA ■ YEAR: 1993



■ **If the *Monty Python* team decided to ever make a videogame, it's quite possible that *Panic!* would have been the result. Known in Japan as *Switch*, *Panic!* is one of the craziest, and bravest games to appear on a Sega console and it's a testament to Sega's creativity at the time that it made it to actual market.**

Held together by the thinnest of plot threads, *Panic!* sees Slap, a young boy, and his pet dog Skip getting sucked into a Mega-CD after the world's electricity fails. Slap soon discovers himself in a number of surreal scenarios that involve a room and a number of buttons. Pushing buttons sometimes moves Slap to a different room, and will occasionally destroy famous monuments, but mostly they'll trigger some of the most surreal gaming sequences of all time. Watching the Mona Lisa transmogrify into a werewolf, seeing The Thinker walk away from his famous seat after flushing a nearby chain and watching the room get sucked up around you by a hungry hoover are just some of the weird and fantastical things that *Panic!* throws at you, and it simply gets more surreal as the game goes on. Yes, it can be argued that the gameplay is incredibly simplistic, and the jokes wear thin all too quickly, but *Panic!* is hilarious fun while it lasts.

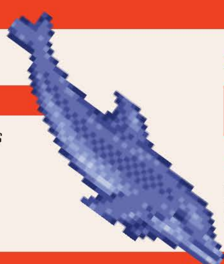


» [Mega-CD] *Panic!* is full of ridicuously surreal moments. You never know what will happen next.

» EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

■ DEVELOPER: WESTWOOD ■ YEAR: 1994

■ The port of Westwood's hit *Dungeons & Dragons* game is notable for featuring an amazingly atmospheric score. It's also compatible with the Mega-CD's mouse.



» ECCO THE DOLPHIN

■ DEVELOPER: NOVOTRADE INTERNATIONAL ■ YEAR: 1993

■ The only reason we're including this port here is because Spencer Nilsen's new soundtrack is absolutely glorious.



» JAGUAR XJ220

■ DEVELOPER: CORE DESIGN ■ YEAR: 1993

■ This is one of the better racing games, with fast visuals and some slick scaling and rotation effects. Just ignore the weedy sound effects.



» FORMULA ONE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP: BEYOND THE LIMIT

■ DEVELOPER: SEGA SPORTS ■ YEAR: 1994

■ **This is the** best pure racing game available for Sega's add-on, playing like a steroid-injected version of *Super Monaco Grand Prix*. Known in Japan as *Heavenly Symphony*, it's an exceptionally polished racer with beautiful presentation (you get audio commentary before each track) lots of gameplay modes and a huge variety of different cars to race. The graphics throughout are excellent, making great use of the Mega-CD's scaling and rotation effects to give a really good impression of speed.



» POPFUL MAIL

■ DEVELOPER: SEGA/WORKING DESIGNS ■ YEAR: 1994

■ **While *Popful Mail*** first appeared on the PC98, it's a completely different game compared to the later Mega-CD release. While the original game was a side-on RPG, with tiny graphics and a combat system that was ripped from *Ys*, the Mega-CD effort was far more ambitious. Coded by Sega/SIMIS with localisation support from Working Designs, it's a fantastic platformer that's filled with memorable characters and genuinely fantastic dialogue and voice acting. Working Designs gave even the lowliest characters a chance to shine, while the whole game has the vibe of the later *Wonder Boy* adventures (no bad thing in our book). A truly delightful platformer.



» SILPHEED

■ DEVELOPER: GAME ARTS ■ YEAR: 1993

■ **While *Robo Aleste*** is the best traditional shooter on Sega's Mega-CD, this amazing effort from Game Arts certainly gives it a run for its money. *Silpheed*'s trump card is that it uses polygons to create its dynamic gameworld. While this means it can look rather ugly, it runs at a phenomenal pace, capturing the excited spirit of arcade smashes like *Star Blade*. There's something truly epic about taking down wave upon wave of enemy fighters while you soar other the body of a huge mothership. There's a superb movie-like atmosphere to the game that is far more effective in engaging the player than the many FMV-based games found on the system.

THE NEW ZEALAND STORY



Kiwis might not be able to fly, but Tiki, the star of New Zealand Story, certainly soared. The most sugary platformer ever made, here's your indispensable guide to it. Brush your eyes with toothpaste after reading…

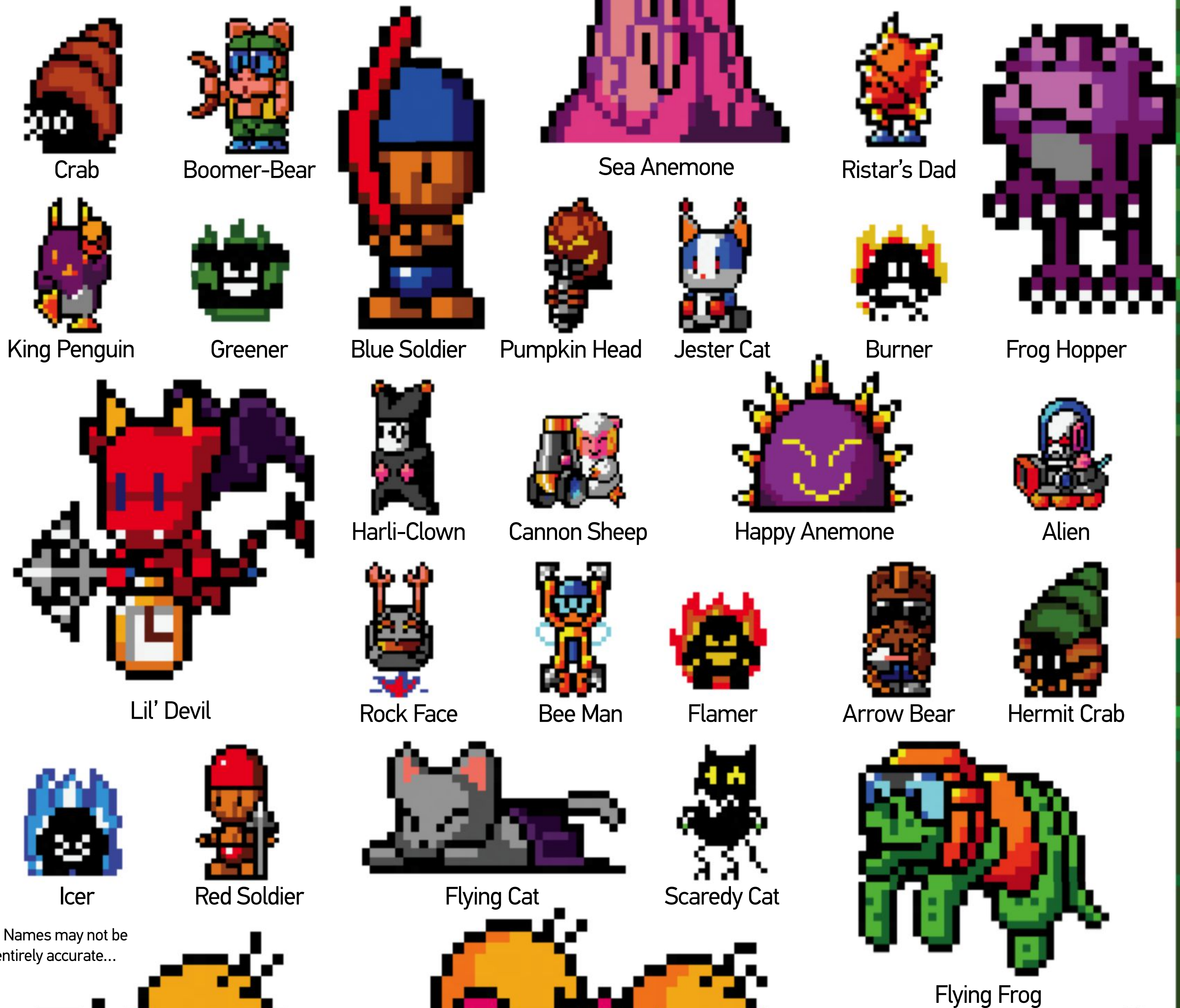
The New Zealand Story **is an unusual coin-op. It might look cute and cuddly on the outside, but beneath its furry exterior is a ferocious and unforgiving beast that doesn't suffer platformer fools kindly. It's also deceptively large. The average arcade visitor sitting in front of its cabinet and finishing it, without warping, will likely result in them contracting temporary colour blindness and very tired legs. The game is packed with colour and variety at every turn, from its secret-laden levels and multitude of different weapons and power-ups, to its wide menagerie of enemies and outlandish drivable vehicles – flying duck pedalo thing, flying saucer!**

The brainchild of *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands*' makers Taito, *The New Zealand Story* even manages to out-chipper its slightly older *Bubble Bobble* stable mates, by starring the most sickeningly cute hero to appear in anything ever: a line-eyed yellow Kiwi bird named Tiki who, armed with a bow and arrow, embarks on a mission to rescue his kidnapped girlfriend and kiwi buddies from a large blue Leopard Seal named Wally – continuing Taito's ostensibly odd hatred for large sea life (in *Bubble Bobble,* of course, heroes Bub and Bob were tormented by a dead Beluga Whale named Baron Von Blubba, oh, and lets not forget most of the stuff that's out to kill you in the *Darius* series). ▶



Pixel Perfect

Your guide to the denizens* native to New Zealand.
Warning: they're cute but deadly



* Names may not be entirely accurate…



» [Arcade] Taito proved to be masters at the cute platformer and *The New Zealand Story* is a classic example.

Other essential Taito platformers

Chack'n Pop 1983



Taito got off to a shaky start with *Chack'n Pop*, which isn't really a great platformer. Too many ideas (it plays like a mix of *Bomberman*, *Donkey Kong* and *Pac-Man*) make it too complex. The objective is to free caged love hearts and reach the level exit without getting killed by the Von Blubba enemies.

The Fairyland Story 1985



Taito went from one extreme to the next as *The Fairyland Story* is a bit too simple. You play a witch who can turn her enemies into cakes, which she can then push off ledges to squish other enemies or zap with her magic wand to destroy them. Simple mechanics and level design, it's nothing that special.

Bubble Bobble 1985



Third time was most certainly the charm, as *Bubble Bobble* marks the moment Taito got the platformer mix spot on: a simple objective (clear the screen of enemies), interesting stages, and a clever attack mechanic. It's a classic that, for some platformer fans, has never been bettered.

Rainbow Islands: The Story Of Bubble Bobble II 1987



With the same tasty ingredients as *Bubble Bobble* but rearranging the formula brilliantly, *Rainbow Islands* is a superb sequel. Bubbles are replaced with another weapon/method of getting around in the arcing form of rainbows, and the objective isn't to help Bub and Bob clear the stages of threats, but reach the summit before a rising water tide drowns them.

Liquid Kids 1990



This platformer combines elements of *Bubble Bobble* with *The New Zealand Story*, to great effect. You play a platypus hippo crossbreed that attacks his enemies by dousing them in water and trapping them inside bubbles. Its level design is more akin to *The New Zealand Story*.

Parasol Stars: The Story Of Bubble Bobble III 1991



Parasol Stars was born on home formats (although Darran swears he played a coin-op on Barry Island seafront). It reverted back the single screen stages of *Bubble Bobble*, but with *Rainbow Island*'s looks. It also introduced new weapon in a handy parasol that could be used to pick up and launch enemies. A solid platformer, but not as good as its predecessors.

Though *The New Zealand Story* looks like a more saccharine continuation/spin-off of the *Bubble Bobble* series, it – and *Bubble Bobble*'s – roots can actually be traced back to an earlier 1985 Taito game with a similar name: *The Fairyland Story*. Released the year before *Bubble Bobble*, and with similar gameplay (and giving us a sneak peek at its famous bubble mechanic – when you died in the game your character floated away inside a bubble), *The Fairyland Story* could almost be described as a forerunner to both *Bubble Bobble* and *The New Zealand Story*.

In *The Fairyland Story*, the levels are limited to a single screen with players assuming the role of a witch named Ptolemy who has the ability to turn enemies into cakes – making them easier on the stomach but more importantly safe to destroy (much like the effect bubbles have on enemies in *Bubble Bobble*). In terms of DNA sharing with *The New Zealand Story*, apart from the obvious title link, both games have a visual resemblance. Their stages are bright and colourful, and don't have that weird ominous vibe that *Bubble Bobble*'s seem to have. Both are wholly smiley happy games and feature the same time referee enemy too, a little devil wearing a Flava Flav style timepiece around his neck. Oh and the keen eyed Taito platformer fan may have also spotted that one of the secret areas in *The New Zealand Story* has a brick formation that resembles Ptolemy.

Whereas Taito introduced scrolling series to its *Bubble Bobble* series with *Rainbow Islands*, *The New Zealand Story* had omni-scrolling stages, and as such the route to the level exit (represented by a caged kiwi) was not always obvious.

However, to help make finding them that little bit easier, Taito included a useful in-game You Are Here map, showing the whereabouts of Tiki in relation to the exit, while also scrawling direction-giving signage over many of the stages. With many of these exits also elevated, it was often essential that Tiki commandeered the aforementioned drivable vehicles (Hot Air Balloon, Flying Saucer, Balloon, Duck and something that looks like a sheep's head) from his enemies to reach them. In addition to transport, what also made *The New Zealand Story* stand out from *Bubble Bobble* were weapons. While Bub and Bob were always lumped with one (albeit cool) way to take down their enemies (bubbles, rainbow, parasol), Tiki was given far more variety in what he could use to decimate his foes. The same was true for his enemies, who don't kill Tiki on contact (unusual for a platformer) and instead must hit him with their own projectile weapons.

Like *Bubble Bobble* and (most notably) *Rainbow Islands*, *The New Zealand Story* was also packed with secrets and things to discover. As well as the staple Taito EXTEND letters to collect for some much handy extra lifeage, hidden warp gates that transported Tiki to later stages and secret rooms that could also be exposed using weapons, there were also amusing heaven sub-stages too that saw Tiki rise up to the pearly gates when he snuffed it on certain stages. Once there, he could either try to complete these stages' tricky platform sections, which ended the game early with the message Tiki had crossed over to the other side, or, if the secret exit wasn't found and taken then returned back to New Zealand to continue his story; effectively offering players a free second chance.

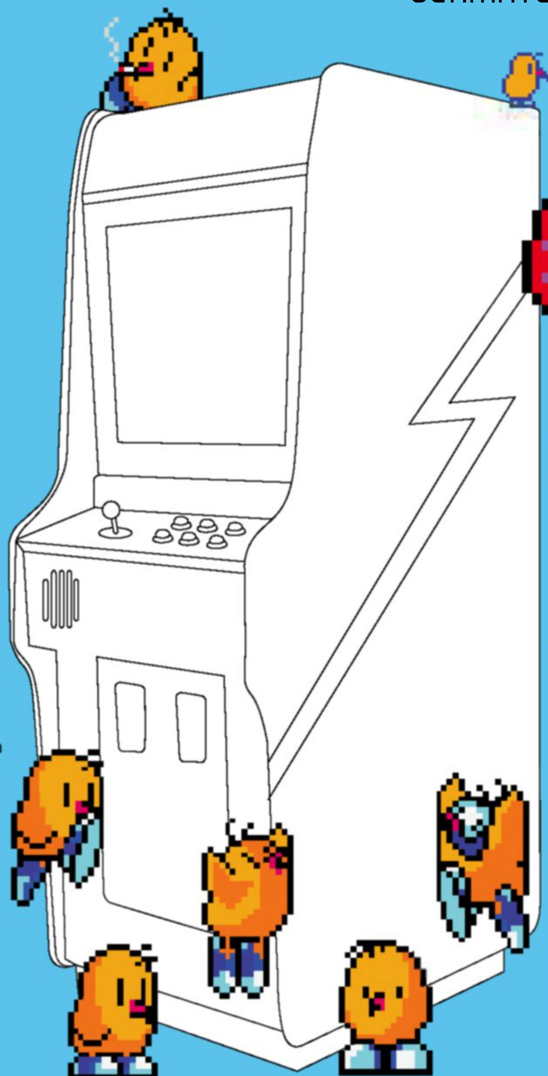
Packed with variety, secrets to find and weighty challenge, *The New Zealand Story* is one of the most iconic platformers of the Eighties, and no doubt the popularity it enjoyed was encouraged by the large number of home conversions it received.

Most are good to excellent, with only one genuinely disappointing effort appearing on the CPC. The other ports provided solid adaptations of the coin-op and though the 8-bit micro versions were missing elements such as the warp zones and hidden areas, its challenge, ambition and cutesy look was well captured.

Oddly, Taito never released a direct sequel to *The New Zealand Story*, instead choosing to focus its attention on the *Bubble Bobble* series and keep the character of Tiki alive through cameo appearances in other titles. The last spurt of activity within the series was a remake for the DS in 2007. *New Zealand Story Revolution* was a revamp of the original coin-op, one that retained its punishing difficulty and subtly changing the feel of the game by allowing Tiki perform a double jump, a dash and take multiple hits. It also added touch and dual screen functionality too.



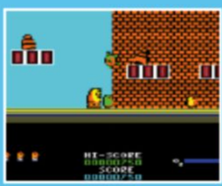
» [Arcade] Being a kiwi Tiki can't actually fly, so he instead uses all sorts of different transport in order to chase after his beloved Phee Phee.



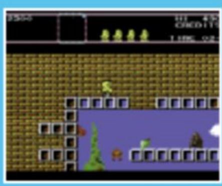
The coin-op conversions



Amiga
A solid conversion with colourful visuals, catchy music and neat touches taken from the coin-op, including the attract screens and stage map, though missing some of the sub screens and enemies.



Amstrad CPC
A poor port seemingly based on the Spectrum conversion. While the visuals have colour, they also look blocky and garish, with enemies clashing horribly against the backgrounds.



Commodore 64
A top notch effort, this one plays smoothly, looks the part (although Tiki sprite seems looks more like a baby chick) and retains the high challenge of the coin-op. Another impressive port.



Mega Drive
This Mega Drive port is an adaptation of an alternate version of the coin-op, often mistaken for being a unique conversion native to the console. It's not quite the version many will remember.



NES
Known as *Kiwi Kraze* in the US, this is a solid home conversion. It is marred by its washed out graphics, the common bout of screen flicker and a remixed audio track that might polarise opinion.



Sega Master System
A solid effort, this is certainly impressive. With faithful visuals and smooth scrolling, it's head and shoulders above many other conversions, though its muffled audio is disappointing.



Atari ST
Not as pretty or as smooth as the impressive Amiga effort. Like the disappointing CPC version, it's the speed that's the biggest problem – the scrolling and animation feels a bit choppy.



PC Engine / TurboGrafx-16
Superb. The graphics aren't as colourful as the coin-op but you'd struggle to really notice unless you ran both versions side by side. Other than that it's very polished.



ZX Spectrum
The graphics lack colour, the levels aren't as packed as the original, the scrolling isn't smooth, and it's a multi-loader too. Still, it's still an impressive conversion that captures the feel of the coin-op.



Sharp X68000
As you would expect from Japan's best kept secret, the Sharp X68 turns in a splendid conversion. Visually and sonically it's a beauty (even if the visuals are a wee bit darker than the PC Engine port).



FM Towns Marty
A solid effort that scores bonus points for allowing you to set the resolution mode and difficulty level. It looks stunning, sounds the part and contains most of the secrets and bonuses areas.

The Old Conversion Story

We caught up with Richard Palmer, programmer of the C64 version of the game



How did you get the job converting *The New Zealand Story*?
I worked for Ocean Software and the timing was right as I had just finished a project. So it basically went like this:
Boss: You're doing *The New Zealand Story* next.
Me: Okay.

Had you played the game before?
My first play of *The New Zealand Story* was upon the arrival of the arcade machine at Ocean Software. I hadn't played it before that. If I recollect correctly, I was hooked on *Bomb Jack* at that time!

What support did you get from Taito?
We were sent the printed design document and I had the actual arcade machine available for reference. I used that for mapping out where the baddies go as the design document didn't contain level-by-level layouts.

Is there anything you missed out that you'd have like to have added?
There may have been, but I can't remember, but I think I tried to get everything in within the timeframe we had to develop it.

What was the hardest aspect to get right?
The baddie placement. I wrote a level editor to speed up the process, but referencing the arcade machine and then placing them correctly in the editor was a time consuming process.

How do you think the C64 version compared to other 8-bit versions?
I never thought about it. They seemed good though. To be honest, I have never played the other versions. Arcade and C64 only.

Were you pleased with the high review scores that *The New Zealand Story* received at the time?
I was pleased, and still am. On occasions when I have searched the internet for it, only positive comments and memories show up. So that pleases me too.

Welcome To New Zealand

We take a look at the areas that make up The New Zealand Story, and offer you some handy hints on how to beat their bosses too

AREA 1: Auckland

The story starts outside Auckland Zoo, where Tiki's pals and girlfriend Phee Phee are kidnapped by the horrible leopard seal Wally. This area is the easiest in the game, helping players get to grips with everything it throws at them – and if you use the hidden warp zone located next to the bricks by the 'help me' graffiti, it's an absolutely doddle.





BOSS: Frozen Whale

The first boss is easy when you know what you're doing. When the battle starts, the whale will hover around the stage lobbing snowflakes into the air that cascade down towards the ground. The flakes can be destroyed but, from the outside, the whale can't. Therefore, the trick here is to let him gobble you up, then start attacking from inside. Once in his gut the area naturally becomes a bit tight on space, so it's tricky avoiding the deadly stomach liquid that drips from the whale's stomach's inner walls. Avoid the drips while sticking him with enough arrows and the blubbery beast will eventually fall.

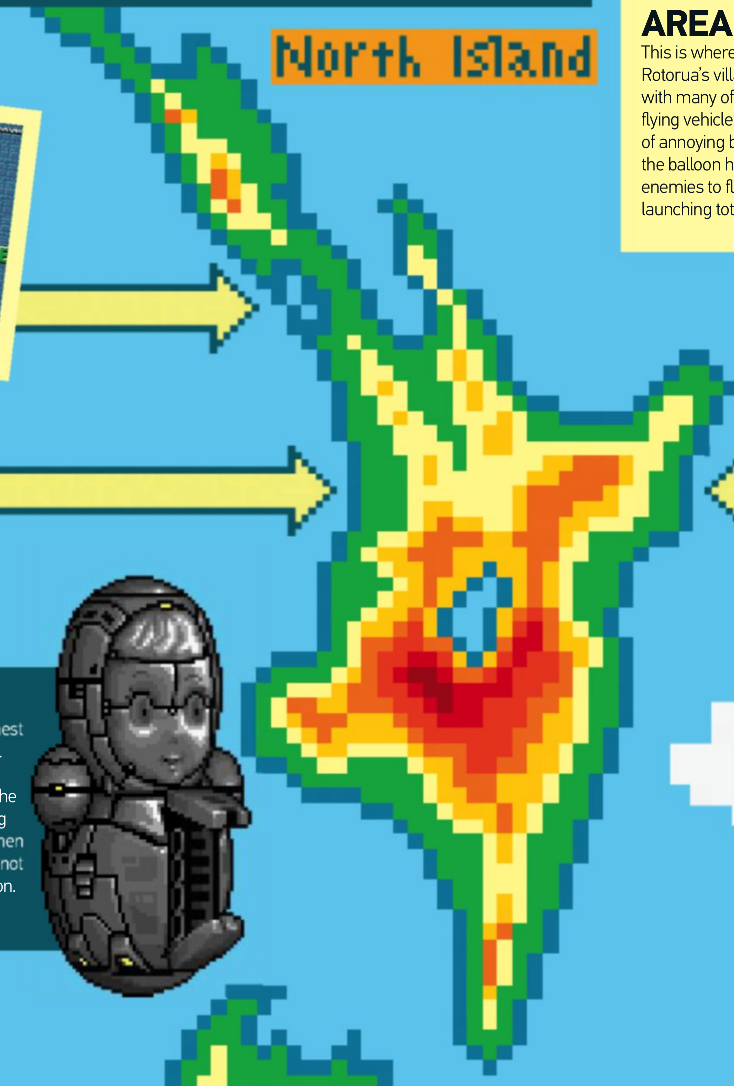






AREA 2: Rotorua

This is where the game starts to raise the challenge. Rotorua's village-themed stages are tricky to navigate, with many of them needing to be traversed using flying vehicles. Sections of this level also have loads of annoying balloon gates, which get released when the balloon holding them is popped and allow caged enemies to flood into the playing field, and arrow-launching totems that make Tiki's plight more difficult.



BOSS: Stone Octopus

This imposing stone octopus looks like it might have mistakenly wandered in from *Darius*. Though imposing, once you've twigged the knack of how to topple him he doesn't pose too much of a problem. His only method of attack is black ink that he sprays from his turret and annoyingly transforms into deadly bats that home in on Tiki's position. The trick is to attack him turret-on, and use the platforms at the far right of the screen to match the height of the octopus. This way you wipe out most of the bats, and can then get a few easy hits off. It's a slow but relatively assured way to defeat this annoying **stone squid**.



AREA 3: Waitomo Caves

The stage is where things start to get wetter. Tiki must don snorkel and goggles and navigate a cave of water pools and powerful currents that push him forward. This stage also has more sections that require Tiki to hop inside a flying machine too, but at least finding your way through it is made simple thanks to all the directional signage adorned all over the cave walls.





BOSS: Amida Meiro

This flying Russian doll-resembling robot has a door on its chest that opens up and launches five missiles that home in on Tiki. The trick here is to pick up a flying device before entering the battle so you can position Tiki between the top platform and the ceiling of the stage. Then simply move Tiki up and down, firing off arrows and flying him to the very summit of the screen when the missiles get a bit too close. There the robot's missiles cannot reach Tiki, and will travel straight through his flying contraption. It's another boss that's a piece of cake when you know how.

Kiwi Cameos

Tiki The Kiwi wasn't adverse to appearing in other Taito games…



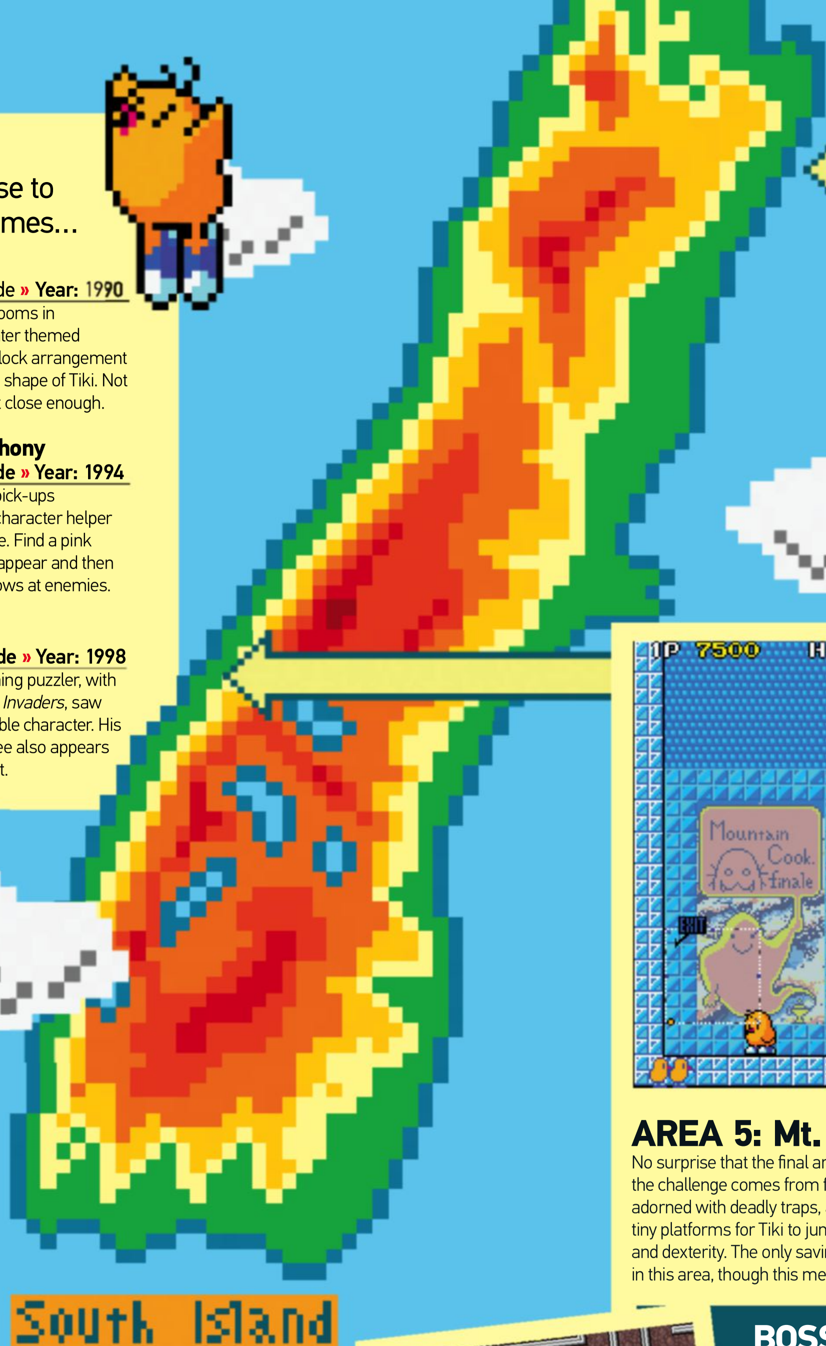
Liquid Kids
» System: Arcade » Year: 1990
One of the secret rooms in this underrated water themed platformer has a block arrangement that resembles the shape of Tiki. Not really a cameo, but close enough.



Bubble Symphony
» System: Arcade » Year: 1994
Collecting certain pick-ups summons a Taito character helper from another game. Find a pink scroll and Tiki will appear and then proceed to fire arrows at enemies.



Pop'n Pop
» System: Arcade » Year: 1998
This balloon matching puzzler, with elements of *Space Invaders*, saw Tiki star as a playable character. His girlfriend Phee Phee also appears to give him support.



AREA 4: Cook Strait

This area is probably the hardest in the game. In fact, it's so challenging, Taito decided it didn't need a boss. The lovely-looking seaside and beach backdrops of this area contrasts harshly against its devilish stages, which include a tricky section that takes place almost entirely underwater. This area also has one of the most challenging levels in the entire game; its final stage that takes place on a large spike-covered pirate ship.







AREA 5: Mt. Cook

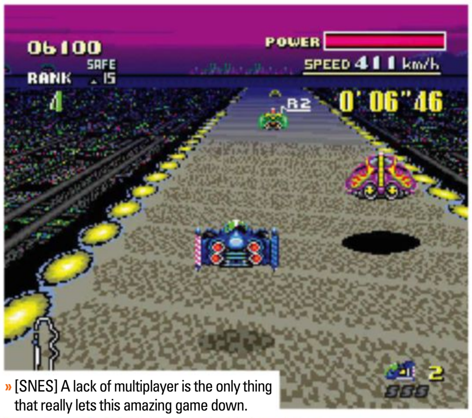
No surprise that the final area is another tricky one to beat. This time the challenge comes from finding your way around a maze-like stage adorned with deadly traps, and a really tricky slippery ice section with tiny platforms for Tiki to jump between, testing your platforming skills and dexterity. The only saving grace is that enemies aren't as ferocious in this area, though this means vehicles are on the sparse side.





BOSS: Wally

This is it, the final battle. Wally the walrus can be a bugger to beat if you haven't equipped yourself with a flying contraption and/or the laser weapon, thus the perfect partner to take into this battle is the laser-firing flying saucer. Wally is attached to a big balloon and attacks using something that looks like a grenade launcher. The most important thing to remember for this battle is that, like the first boss, he has an impenetrable outer shell – the only way to beat him is to pop that great big walrus-faced balloon that is keeping him airborne.



» [SNES] A lack of multiplayer is the only thing that really lets this amazing game down.



» [SNES] Boost pads are a great way of getting you back in the game when you're falling behind.



» [SNES] Finishing in first place still leaves you with a fantastic feeling inside, particularly on the higher leagues.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

F-ZERO

» **PLATFORM:** SNES » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO EAD » **RELEASED:** 1990

Considering what *F-Zero* did for the racing genre, it's galling that it's quickly turning into one of Nintendo's forgotten licences. When *F-Zero* first launched on the Super Nintendo in 1990 it felt like a revelation, offering an arcade style experience that few home computer and console racers could deliver. Sure you had great racing games on home systems like *Deathchase* and *Stunt Car Racer*, but there was a distinct difference between them and their arcade rivals. *F-Zero* wasn't perfect, but it went a long way to closing this gap.

F-Zero set a new standard for racing games thanks to its silky smooth Mode 7 visuals, instantly making many Mega Drive and Amiga racers of the time look rather tired. Add in a scintillating soundtrack that perfectly matched the turbocharged onscreen action and Nintendo's game proved to be an aesthetic delight. It delivered an exciting new sci-fi setting as well; playing out the gruelling five lap races against a futuristic backdrop, full of day-glo neons and snaking skyscrapers.

While there are only eight different courses in the game, the three difficulty leagues (Knight, Queen and King) meant that many of the tricks were revisited, often with new layouts. Add in some truly ferocious AI on the later leagues and *F-Zero* becomes an insanely challenging racer that still remains a joy to play.



> “Using a similar 3D routine to Pilotwings, F-Zero is simply the most impressive racing game I’ve ever encountered”
>
> JULIAN RIGNALL – MEAN MACHINES, 90%



THE BEST F-ZERO MOMENTS



“It’s all in the reflexes”

The are four crafts available in *F-Zero*; Captain Falcon’s Blue Falcon, Samurai Goroh’s Fire Stingray, Dr Stewart’s Golden Fox and Pico’s Wild Goose, and each vehicle offers a completely different driving experience. While the Blue Falcon’s balanced stats make it perfect for beginners, we actually prefer the toughness and tight handling of Wild Goose.



Recharge your batteries

F-Zero is a surprisingly challenging game on its later courses and you’ll often find yourself getting punished by tight corners and losing precious energy as a result. Once your energy is completely depleted you’ll burst into flames, something you want to avoid at all costs. Needless to say, the moment at the start of each stage when you get to recharge your vehicle is not one you’ll soon forget.



Silence is golden

If you don’t regularly make use of the L and R buttons in *F-Zero* you’ll soon become a cropper. It becomes readily apparent when you reach Silence, the final track of the Knight League. It’s an absolutely brutal course full of tight 90° turns that really separates the men from the boys. Despite its overall toughness it remains a superbly designed track, cleverly introducing you to the pain to come.

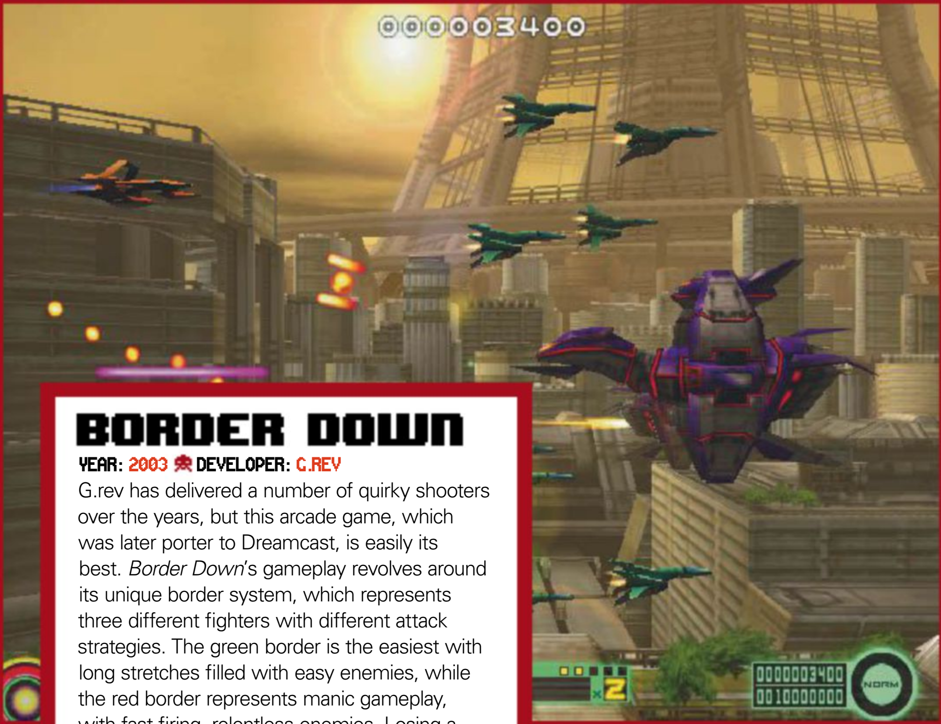


The need for speed

F-Zero is all about speed, with the four pilots being able to achieve speeds at over 400 kilometers an hour. Even that’s not enough for these speed freaks though, so it’s handy that you’re rewarded with a boost after every lap, which rushes you forward at sickening speeds of over 500kph. It’s a superb feeling the first time you use it, but also offers a level of strategy later in the game.

30 ESSENTIAL SHOOT-'EM-UPS

The shoot-'em-up is one of gaming's oldest and richest genres, covering a wide variety of often bewildering subgenres. With this in mind, Darran Jones sets his target on some of the genre's most essential examples. Some have been included because they helped set new standards, while others are included because they're amazing examples of the genre. If you are interested in diving into one of gaming's eldest genres though, our essential list is the perfect place to start



BORDER DOWN

YEAR: 2003 **DEVELOPER:** G.REV

G.rev has delivered a number of quirky shooters over the years, but this arcade game, which was later porter to Dreamcast, is easily its best. *Border Down*'s gameplay revolves around its unique border system, which represents three different fighters with different attack strategies. The green border is the easiest with long stretches filled with easy enemies, while the red border represents manic gameplay, with fast-firing, relentless enemies. Losing a life causes you to drop down a border (or die if you're on the red border) meaning the game gets more difficult with each lost life. It's worth noting however that borders get raised again by clearing a stage with a set amount of points. Underappreciated upon its release, *Border Down*'s reputation only increases with age, making it one of the most expensive Dreamcast shoot-'em-ups you can currently buy.





MARK JONES

MY FAVOURITE SHOOT-'EM-UP

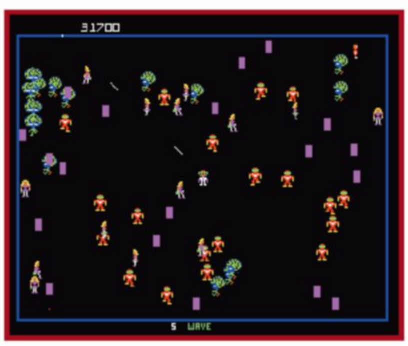
I would have to choose *Hybris* or its follow *Battle Squadron* on the Amiga. *Hybris* came out in early 1989 and for a time I worked in a computer shop and we would have it loaded up all the while and it would always attract a large crowd, some of who would walk away with a machine. Then at the end of 1989 its sequel *Battle Squadron* was released, which repeated and improved on its predecessor. Not long after I sold my Amiga and all my games and didn't play either again until this year via emulation. Back in the day I didn't take much notice of the soundtracks to these two games, but hearing them again after all this time immediately transformed me back to the late Eighties. Both games ooze classic late Eighties, slick, arcade action, all wrapped up in great graphics, fiendish gameplay and a soundtrack to die for.



CYBERNOID

YEAR: 1988 **DEVELOPER:** RAFFAELE CECCO

We're always fans of shooters that try to do something a little different, and Cecco's excellent *Cybernoid* certainly falls into that category. The levels of *Cybernoid* are deviously designed single screens that are often filled with all manner of dangerous obstacles that have to be navigated. In many respects it actually plays like a platformer, as pixel perfect precision is required to get through certain sections of the game. It's certainly difficult, but the cleverly designed stages and brilliant music constantly drag you back for more.





ROBOTRON: 2084

YEAR: 1983 **DEVELOPER:** WILLIAMS

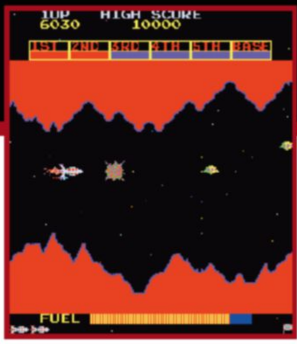
Eugene Jarvis' *Robotron* may not have been the first shooter to allow a shooter to fire in multiple directions, but it was the first to let you do this with a second stick. The end result not only helped define Eugene's game as one of the most important arena shooters of all time, but has also been endlessly copied in the three decades since. *Geometry Wars*, *Everyday Shooter*, *Gun Spike*, *Black Widow* and *Mutant Storm* are just a few of the games that are indebted to the game, while it's became one of the main control methods for most iOS shooters.

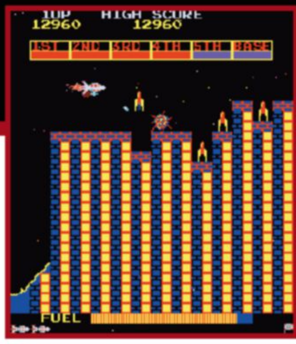


GALAXIAN

YEAR: 1979 **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO

Before *Galaxian* came along you had to use coloured strips of cellophane if you wanted your shooters to be in colour. Namco's *Galaxian* changed all this by introducing multicoloured sprites and explosions, which were a significant update from the bland looking drones found in *Space Invaders*. It also upped the ante significantly by featuring invaders that would aggressively attack you as you played.





SCRAMBLE

YEAR: 1981 **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI

Scramble introduced a number of interesting mechanics to the shoot-'em-up genre. The most notable was the fact that your ship only had a limited amount of fuel, meaning you had to shoot any incoming fuel barrels to replenish it. Then there was the small matter of having two distinct weapons, one for firing at incoming enemies, the other being a missile that could take out ground weapons like missiles and the precious fuel canisters. *Xevious* would continue the notion of taking out air and ground targets, but did it vertically a year later.



STEVE CROW

MY FAVOURITE SHOOT-'EM-UP

I think my favorite shoot-'em-up coin-op was *Scramble*. I just enjoyed the missiles, bombs and graphics. I also liked how the ground was a solid graphic and it had areas with a roof so you had to fly through a tunnel. It came out around the same time as *Defender*, however I found the *Scramble* graphics and gameplay more appealing.

As far as home computer shoot-'em-ups, *Uridium* by Andrew Braybrook was far and away my favourite. It was silky smooth, very challenging and the way the main ship flipped over when you changed direction was magical. The graphics were also beautiful with the shadows giving a pseudo 3D look. I seemed to remember these smart missiles that came after you that were nearly impossible to defeat!



PHOENIX

YEAR: 1980 **DEVELOPER:** AMSTAR ELECTRONICS

For many, *Phoenix* will be synonymous with the huge mothership – one of gaming's first bosses – that sits at the end of its fifth round. It's worth remembering however that the core game is great thanks to its distinctive visuals and useful shield that temporarily protects you from enemies and projectiles.



DEFENDER

YEAR: 1980 **DEVELOPER:** WILLIAMS

Eugene Jarvis cut his teeth on pinball machines before moving into the exciting world of videogames. We're glad he made the transition, as he's responsible for some of the genre's greatest hits. *Defender* was his first effort and it's a spectacular shooter thanks to its silky smooth scrolling, in-your-face explosions and innovative gameplay mechanics. It's also a real bitch to play, requiring intense concentration and superhuman reflexes to master the complex control system (easily the most complicated in a shooter at the time). Real men, men in leather jackets, played *Defender* while clutching a cigarette through their teeth. That's how hard, and cool, Eugene Jarvis's game is.

GALAGA

YEAR: 1981 **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO

Namco's impressive sequel continued to evolve by the franchise and the genre itself. Galaxians could now attempt to steal your ships using a useful tractor beam. Should the ship get sucked up it would follow the enemy until it was shot down (returning to you and doubling your firepower). *Galaga* is also the first example of a bonus round in a shoot-'em-up.



R-TYPE

YEAR: 1987 **DEVELOPER:** IREM

Everything about *R-Type* is superb. It's bosses are imaginative and genuinely terrifying, while its level design is immense and cleverly constructed. It's The Force power-up that really helped to separate Irem's game from its peers, however. A natural evolution of *Gradius*' option, The Force could be detached and added to the front or back of your ship at will, enhancing your firepower and doubling as a useful shield. Oh and did we mention that one boss is an entire level? It's so impressive it's been copied in all manner of shooters since.



IRIDIS ALPHA

YEAR: 1986 **DEVELOPER:** JEFF MINTER

Jeff is well known for building on well known shooters and adding his own distinct personality to them, but he had no problems coming up with his own unique offerings as well. *Iridis Alpha* is one of his finest offerings, delivering all his traditional hallmarks but with some genuinely innovative gameplay twists. The key here is that there are two planet parts, an upper and lower one, which you must flip between as the game continues. The kicker here however is that planet entropy affects the character not being used – it's eventually destroyed if its energy falls too low – meaning you have to constantly flip between each to ensure your score streak continues. It's an excellent game with impossibly slick presentation, plenty of raucous sound effects and gameplay by the proverbial bucketful.



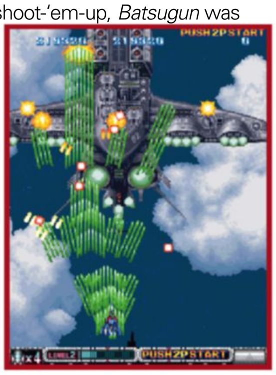


BATSUGUN

YEAR: 1993 **DEVELOPER:** TOAPLAN



Toaplan was deemed as a master of the shoot-'em-up genre, so it's rather fitting that its final shooter would shape the genre for years to come. Aside from being a brilliantly structured shoot-'em-up, *Batsugun* was the first example of the 'manic' or 'bullet hell' shooter that remains incredibly popular within the genre, built around tiny hitboxes, intricate bullet patterns and everything else that has propelled the genre forward since.



ZAXXON

YEAR: 1982 **DEVELOPER:** SEGA

Sega's *Zaxxon* continued with the fuel-spending mechanic that first appeared in *Scramble*, but added its own interesting ideas into the mix. The most striking is its distinctive isometric setting, a first for the genre, which would also lead to another innovative mechanic. *Zaxxon* was the first shooter to use an axis and an altitude meter and you'd often have to raise and lower your ship in order to clear certain parts of a level. It's distinctive look and interesting gameplay saw a raft of similar games appear ranging from *Sammy's Viewpoint* to *Blue Max* on the Atari A8 and Commodore 64.





JEFF MINTER

DEVELOPER INPUT

How important are the controls in a shoot-'em-up?

Very important, since shooters tend to require precision in aiming and moving, therefore the controls have to be excellent. In play you shouldn't have to be thinking about the controls at all; you should be able to move and control your ship and weaponry as if just by thinking.

What do the addition of bosses bring to the genre?

Bosses add a bit of character to a game, and serve to punctuate progress through the game's levels. Many players enjoy the process of learning how best to defeat a boss, and everyone has a favourite boss that they recall fondly from various shooters. I'm not a huge boss fan in my own designs, but like everyone else I've enjoyed good ones in other games.

What were the biggest technical challenges when making an 8-bit shooter?

Pretty much just being able to move enough stuff around to create something challenging. Back then you had arbitrary limits like "the hardware only wants to be able to display 8 sprites" on the C64, or having to shovel everything around yourself using the CPU on the Speccy. You had to either create a clever design that was still fun despite those limitations, or get up to some trickery and optimisation to work around the limits. Most games had to do a bit of both.

What makes iOS so great for shooters?

iOS can be good for shooters, because with a bit of care in implementing the controls and designing the game you can make playing a real pleasure. Conversely you can make it feel really bad if all you do is slap on a fixed onscreen virtual D-pad and fire buttons. Motion controls should be unobtrusive and versatile, and shooting should be auto – making the player tap an onscreen button to fire becomes annoying because in the heat of play it's all too easy to slip your finger off the virtual button. It helps that the platform itself is so handy and portable and has more than enough grunt to move lots of sprites and bullets around.

What mechanically is the best shooter you've played?

I still think in all of shooterdom there's not much to touch *Robotron*. It's just such a great balance of overwhelm from tons of enemies countered by excellent firepower and fire control for the player, along with frantic fight-for-your-life action balanced by the need to identify and rescue friendlies in amongst the onslaught. Classic Jarvis at the peak of his game.

What's your favourite shooter?

I'll avoid being boring by just saying *Robotron* again, and plump for *Tempest*. It dispensed with any kind of pretension of realism and ended up looking like it was taking place in some other dimension. Like many of the best games of that era it exemplified the way a few simple rules and enemies could fit together to yield satisfyingly complex and challenging gameplay. Plus I had an absolute blast doing an updated version when I did *Tempest 2000*.



ANDREW BRAYBROOK

DEVELOPER INPUT

How important are the controls in a shoot-'em-up?

In the early days of arcade machines, the cabinets tended to have custom controls. Whatever the game designer wanted, they got. That made all the games feel different. Later they standardised arcade machines to a joystick and usually two or three buttons for interchangeability and cost saving.

The control method is your interface between the player and the game, so it is vital to get right. You can have the prettiest game ever, but if it feels slow to play, or is awkward to use, then it's not going to be played much. Too many controls can be just as awkward as too few.

What do the addition of bosses bring to the genre?

The bosses usually bring a level to a crescendo, marking a significant achievement if you can beat them, and an obstacle to prepare for.

We never had them in the old days! They represent a large percentage of your level graphics, so until we started loading level data in they would not have been worth the expense. Our first programming experience of them was *Rainbow Islands*, where there was a bigger version of one of the level meanies at the end of each island.

It was always entertaining watching people meet the Big Spider boss for the first time. It's important that these are difficult but not almost impossible to beat.

What were the biggest technical challenges when making an 8-bit shooter?

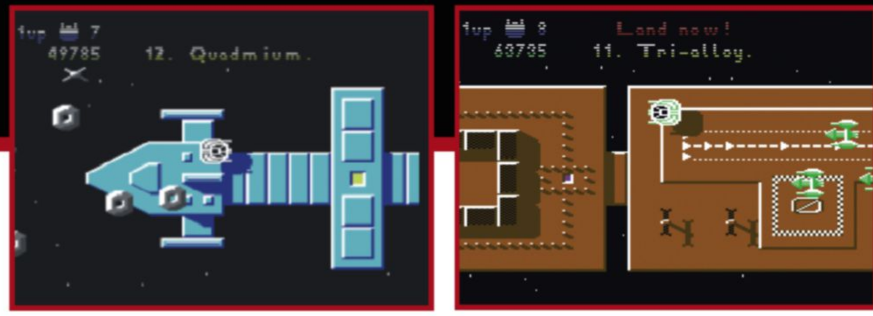
Where to start! We felt we were in competition to at least match what we were playing in the arcades. They usually had two separate character playfields, maybe 64 sprites and multiple palettes, so with one character playfield and eight sprites we had to be creative. Generally I tried to design games that fitted the machine's capabilities.

What mechanically is the best shooter you've played?

I have a lot of respect for Japanese arcade game designers, and the game I enjoyed playing at the time was *Raiden II*. There were some clever and imaginative weapons and multi-part enemies. This game is quite generous with the power-ups, doesn't overwhelm the player, there are more cunning ways than fighting firepower with firepower. Still a very pretty game too.

What's your favourite shooter?

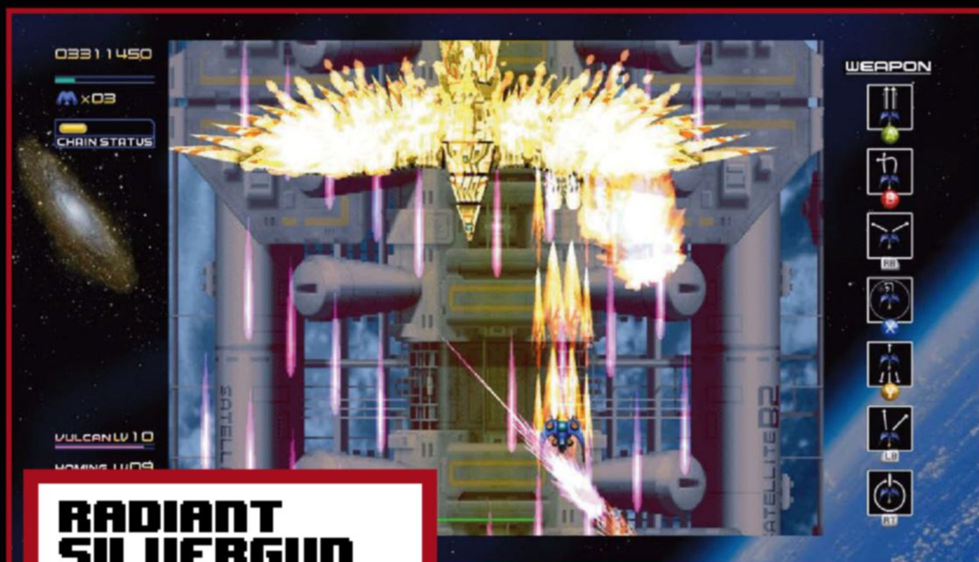
On the 8-bit computers: Atari *Dropzone*. Not many games make you buy a computer just to play them. Very professional look and lots of pizazz. In the arcades: I'm going to say *Asteroids*. We used to play that in the chip shop every Friday night. Oddly, no power-ups and no big bosses, not really any graphics. Just great atmosphere from the sound, you versus the rocks.



URIDIUM

YEAR: 1986 **DEVELOPER:** ANDREW BRAYBROOK

Before *Uridium* came along, if you wanted an arcade-like experience you had to go to the arcades. Andrew Braybrook's incredibly slick shooter changed all that, and while it wasn't the most innovative of games, it delivered an intense arcade experience that other 8-bit computers of the time jealously looked on at. It received an Amiga sequel in 1993.



RADIANT SILVERGUN

YEAR: 1998 **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE

Treasure's *Radiant Silvergun* remains one of the Saturn's most expensive shoot-'em-ups, and with good reason. It's amazing. First released in arcades in 1998, it threw away the shoot-'em-up rulebook and decided to reinvent it from the ground up. The end result was is one of the most fantastic shooters of all time that deserves all the accolades constantly thrust upon it. By far the most innovative aspects of *Radiant Silvergun* was that it did away with power-ups completely – a rarity at the time – instead giving access to your seven weapons via an innovative three-button system, one of which was an awesome plasma sword which could be used to mob up nearby movements. *Silvergun* also introduced an interesting colour chaining system (which was admittedly bettered with *Ikaruga*) while bosses could be systematically destroyed on a part-by-part basis. Add in a rousing soundtrack and astonishing visuals that pushed the Saturn to its limit and Treasure's reputation within the genre remains well earned.

GRADIUS

YEAR: 1985 **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI

Power-ups would go on to become a big deal for the shoot-'em-up genre, but their use is particularly noticeable in *Gradius*. Picking up orbs would highlight each weapon on your bar, effectively allowing you to choose weapons as you saw fit. Interestingly, few games outside the *Gradius* franchise actually use it, despite the fact that it allows for plenty of diversity while you play.



1942

YEAR: 1984 **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM

1942 wasn't the first shoot-'em-up that Capcom ever made, but it's easily its most important. The vertically scrolling shooter was unusual for the time as it featured a distinct World War II setting, a world away from the futuristic vistas used in many games at the time. Then there was the excellent roll mechanic which let your plane loop-the-loop, effectively allowing it to dodge incoming bullets. *1942* became a huge success for Capcom, turning into the company's first franchise, and has received numerous sequels, with the latest being *1942: Joint Strike*, released in 2008.





ALEX TROWERS

MY FAVOURITE SHOOT-'EM-UP

There will always be a soft spot in my heart for *1942*. Days spent honing my skills in the Merrier Harriers pub in Hambledon or challenging strangers in the Butlins in Bognor Regis. Even getting it installed in my cab back in the Bullfrog office.

Oh, crap… *Time Pilot '84*…

SPACE HARRIER

YEAR: 1985 **DEVELOPER:** SEGA AM2

Yu Suzuki's *Space Harrier* is an example of the rail shooter, one of the many offshoots of the shoot-'em-up genre. Taking control of the titular harrier you move into the screen at a sickeningly fast pace shooting down anything that's foolish enough to stray into your sights. Immediately distinctive thanks to its surreal imagery, checkerboard landscapes and use of Super Scaler technology, it delivered an incredibly exhilarating experience, made more exciting if you were lucky enough to play it in its hydraulic cabinet form.





VANGUARD

YEAR: 1981 **DEVELOPER:** TOSE

At first glance, *Vanguard* appears to be a clone Konami's *Scramble* thanks to its Day-Glo colour palette. *Vanguard* ups the ante however by delivering a range of notable little flourishes that really make it stand apart. The most obvious is your ability to fire lasers in four different directions, then there are the fuel canisters that appear in certain sections of the game. Fly into these and your ship will become invulnerable for a brief time – *Flash Gordon*'s *Vultan's Theme* plays in the background – allowing you to barrel into nearby ships. Stages also scroll in numerous directions, including diagonally, while the viewpoint shifts completely on the last leg of your journey, utilising a more top-down approach favoured by most traditional vertical shooters.



FANTASY ZONE

YEAR: 1986 **DEVELOPER:** SEGA

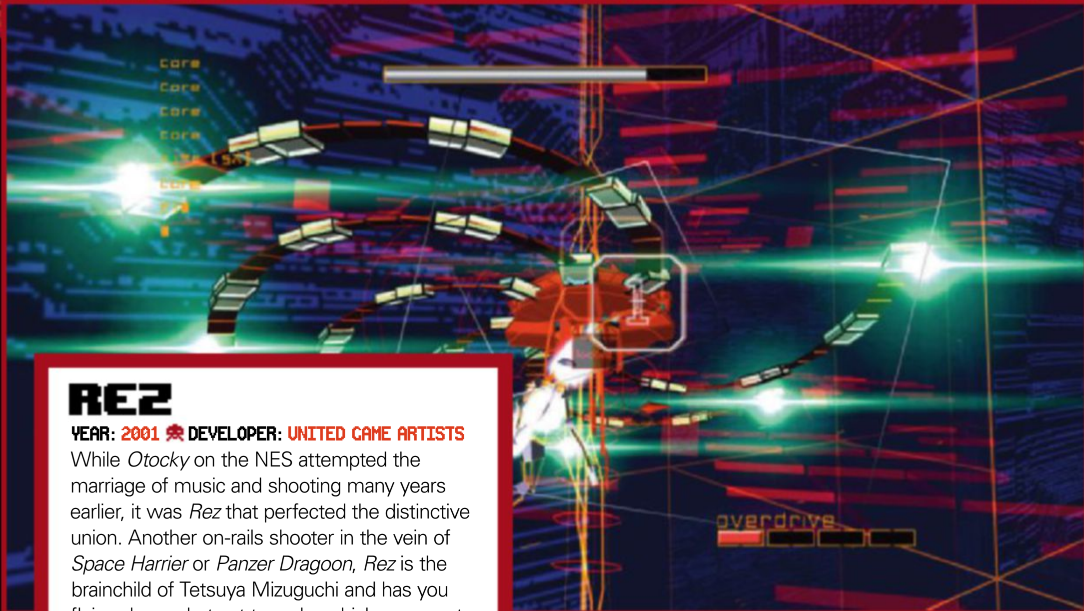
Sega's gaudy revisit to the *Fantasy Zone*, last seen in *Space Harrier*, is notable for not only being one of the first cute-'em-ups, but also introducing money into the genre. Defeated enemies dropped coins, which could then be spent on some suitably barmy weapons in the shop that would occasionally show up as you flew through the level. It's all rounded off by some tight controls and some epic boss fights. Little wonder it spawned numerous sequels and turned star Opa-Opa into a Sega mascot for a short amount of time.



KINGDOM GRAND PRIX

YEAR: 1994 **DEVELOPER:** RAIZING

Risk and reward systems are abundant in shoot-'em-ups, but this is by far one of the most interesting. The lush-looking *Kingdom Grand Prix* combines hardcore shooting with racing, to deliver one of the most unique gaming experiences around. Holding down the fire button allows you to accelerate, but it's at the expense of firing, meaning it's harder to avoid incoming enemies, which will make you fall behind your opponents. It's an interesting concept to be sure, but it's a tough one to get your head around, meaning not everyone will warm to it. Raizing went on to release an excellent Saturn port in 1996.



REZ

YEAR: 2001 **DEVELOPER:** UNITED GAME ARTISTS

While *Otocky* on the NES attempted the marriage of music and shooting many years earlier, it was *Rez* that perfected the distinctive union. Another on-rails shooter in the vein of *Space Harrier* or *Panzer Dragoon*, *Rez* is the brainchild of Tetsuya Mizuguchi and has you flying down abstract tunnels, which represent the innards of a giant network computer. What makes *Rez* stand out though is its beautifully crafted music, which pulsed in time with the in game action. It's a delightful effect made even more impressive as you break through new layers of security, which in turns adds new musical layers to the magnificent tunes. A stunning fusion of sound and gameplay, which has to be seen to be believed. And it still has one of the best levels of any shooter.

SILKWORM

YEAR: 1988 **DEVELOPER:** TECMO

There were lots of two-player co-operative shooters, but this is one of the most unusual, as teamwork was essential for making progress. In Tecmo's interesting shooter, one player controls a helicopter with a forward firing gun, while the other controls a jeep that comes equipped with a handy swivel gun. The ground the jeep travels across is littered with mines and gun emplacements, so it must either jump over them or rely on the helicopter to shoot them out. *Silkworm* also features an interesting shield system where they can be collected for protection or shot at to create a devastating smart bomb that wipes everything out onscreen. An excellent blaster that was supported by plenty of polished home conversions.



IKARUGA

YEAR: 2001 **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE

The Dreamcast has a fantastic selection of shooters, but this interesting offering from Treasure is easily one of the best. It builds on the polarity mechanics that were first introduced in Treasure's *Silhouette Mirage*, meaning your ship can switch between black and white at the press of a button. While you can safely mop up bullets of the same colour – which turns them into energy for your lock-on laser – a bullet from the opposite colour immediately destroys you. It's a wonderfully clever mechanic that quickly builds in difficulty as you weave your way through levels and have to deal with *Ikaruga*'s dual-coloured bosses. Add in a complex scoring system that rewards you for continually chaining kills of the same colour and it's little wonder that *Ikaruga* is so highly regarded within the genre.



TWINKLE STAR SPRITES

YEAR: 1996 **DEVELOPER:** ADK

There are many multiplayer shooters, but *Twinkle Star Sprites* is the first competitive shooter that always springs to mind. Players are assaulted with waves of enemies and must shoot them down, with the vanquished foes being moved across to the other player's screen. The beauty here however is that an opponent can attempt to reflect said attacks back to the original player, who can then try to return the favour and… Well, you get the idea. It's a delightfully nutty mechanic that makes *Twinkle Star Sprites* as much a puzzle game as it is a shooter.





JIM BAGLEY

DEVELOPER INPUT

How do you go about porting a shoot-'em-up?

First off, you need to play the game, right the way through, or at least get info on the whole of the game, so that you know what it needs to look/play like. When porting to a lesser-powered machine, you will also come across many technical challenges, especially when converting the likes of arcade games to 8-bit machines. You will almost certainly come across having to reduce graphics as arcade games used to have large ROMS and lots of animations.

What shooter has the best mechanics?

Salamander. It has something that keeps me coming back to it, and when you get killed, you at least stand a chance of surviving with your new life. I recently played *Vulcan Venture* which is a little like *Salamander* with the power ups, but once you lose your first life, you're pretty much toast for the rest of your lives, as you don't even get a chance of collecting your lost power ups. Unless you're a world class player on it, it's pretty much game over.

What's your favourite shooter?

I have three classics that I love playing even to this day: *Defender*, *Phoenix* and *Scramble*. *Defender* is just awesome, with the speed and explosions, and most of all the sound; it has to be the most enjoyable arcade sound ever! Then there is *Phoenix*, another classic. [I enjoy] the styles of rounds, with varying types of play; to then be confronted by the BIG mother ship on round 5. Then there's *Scramble*, another classic, with just two simple weapons, bullets and bombs. This game has a special place in my heart, because *Scramble* was in a local Spar shop when I was a kid, and they had a challenge, the first one to complete all stages won a whole £10, and I was the first person to do it!



AXELAY

YEAR: 1992 **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI

Konami was on fire during the 16-bit generation and this astounding looking shooter represents the company at its creative peak. Regardless of whether you consider *Axelay*'s 3D sections to be Mode 7 or not, there's no denying that the end result was absolutely stunning. Seeing Wayler rise out of that lava was enough to shut up any non-SNES owner, while the side on levels were just as meticulously designed as the 3D stages. Add in an atmospheric soundtrack and a great selection of weapons and *Axelay* remains one of the best 16-bit home shooters of all time.



WIZBALL

YEAR: 1987 **DEVELOPER:** SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

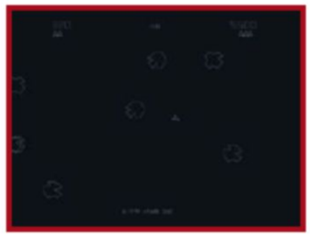
While most shoot-'em-up mechanics evolved in arcades, interesting ideas would occasionally turn up on home computers. One of the best is Sensible Software's *Wizball*, which built on the power-up bar introduced in *Gradius*, but added an innovative new mechanic that literally saw you painting the world as you explored it. Downed enemies dropped paint drops that could be collected and used to restore the monochromatic world to its former vibrant glory.



GARY BRACEY

MY FAVOURITE SHOOT-'EM-UP

In terms of traditional 2D [shooters] my absolute favorite I spent many, many hours on was *Slapfight*. One of Ocean's coin-op conversions that had me hooked from the first minute.



ASTEROIDS

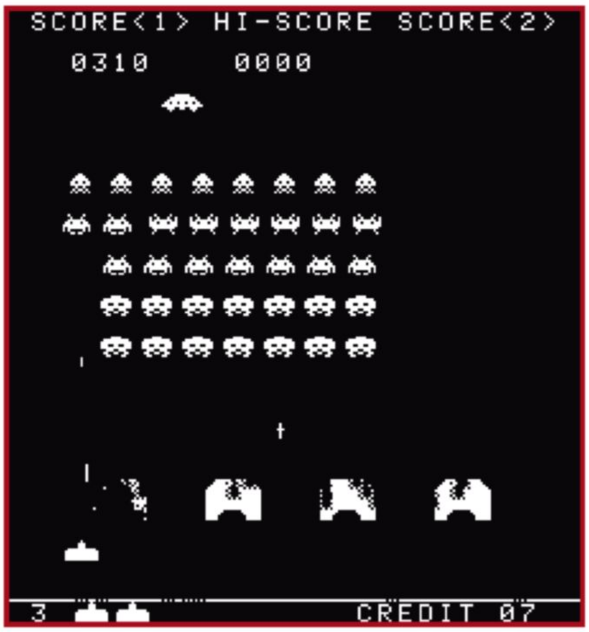
YEAR: 1979 **DEVELOPER:** ATARI

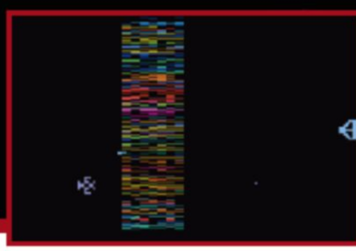
Ed Logg's *Asteroids* remains a fiendishly tough shooter that still mesmerises after 34 years. Surrounded by huge asteroids, you score points by shooting them into oblivion, nimbly avoiding the smaller pieces that break off. It's a great concept made tougher by the increased debris you have to weave through and unerringly accurate flying saucers that can stealthily take you down before you can say 'What was that?' It's also notable for being one of the first games to use a hyperspace (teleport) mechanic.

SPACE INVADERS

YEAR: 1978 **DEVELOPER:** TAITO

It may have been preceded by the two-player competitive shooter *Space War*, but it's Taito's *Space Invader* which subsequently both defined and shaped the shoot-'em-up genre for a great many gamers. Massively influential, Tomohiro Nishikado's groundbreaking game introduced wave-upon-wave of monochromatic enemies to defeat along with many staples that the genre now takes for granted. Even after nearly 35 years, the franchise continues to reinvent itself, with the excellent *Space Invaders: Infinity Gene* being the latest example. Endlessly parodied and a huge part of pop culture, *Space Invaders* is one of the most important videogames of all times and is a defining title that every serious gamer should experience.

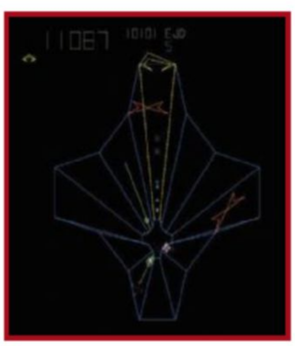




TEMPEST

YEAR: 1980 **DEVELOPER:** DAVE THEURER

While Dave Theurer's *I, Robot* is an amazing technical achievement, it's not quite as frenetic or exhilarating as his wireframe tube shooter from 1980. *Tempest*, like many early arcade shooters, is a delightful balance between hardcore blasting and clever play mechanics and delivers the sort of fast and furious gameplay that would become a staple of its parent genre in later years.



YARS' REVENGE

YEAR: 1982 **DEVELOPER:** HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW

Few games manage to cram so much into a single screen as *Yars' Revenge*. One of the tidiest, most tense and stunning games on the 2600; it's an impressive shooter with plenty of depth. The most successful original 2600 game for good reason, it placed you in an epic battle against a large alien boss and featured some spectacular visual effects – none more so than the explosion that filled the screen once you had successfully delivered the final blow. Gnawing away the boss's shield, while avoiding its deadly swirling weapon and indestructible drone, it was a superb game, impressive technical showcase for the Atari 2600 and a timeless battle to boot.

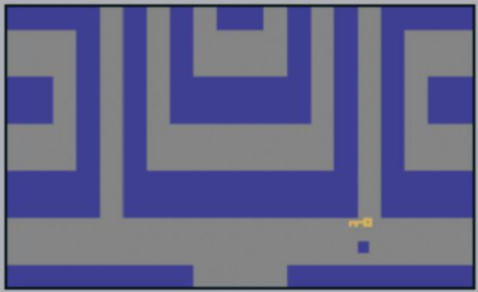
THE MAKING OF

ADVENTURE

One of the most influential action adventure games, Adventure achieved the extraordinary. Stuart Hunt speaks to its creator Warren Robinett about dungeons, ducks and the first gaming Easter egg



» [Atari 2600] They might resemble ducks, but the dragons were pretty scary back then, especially when you come up against one in a 'fog of war' room.



» [Atari 2600] Robinett got the idea for *Adventure* after seeing *Colossal Cave Adventure* – which is also known as *Adventure*.

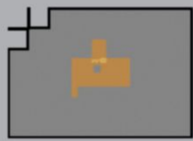


» [Atari 2600] A sneaky bat is the bane of *Adventure* players, forcing them on a wild bat chase.

We would argue that the role-playing game has evolved more than any other genre. The earliest RPGs look barely recognisable against their modern day equivalents. The imaginations of today's RPG fans have far less work to do. Everything now looks crisper, and more realistic. Dragons look like dragons, unwashed villagers look like unwashed villagers and dungeons look like Hollywood film sets. Back in the Seventies though, role-playing games were created using broad strokes and by giving players enough of them to be able to formulate the finer details of their adventures in their own heads.

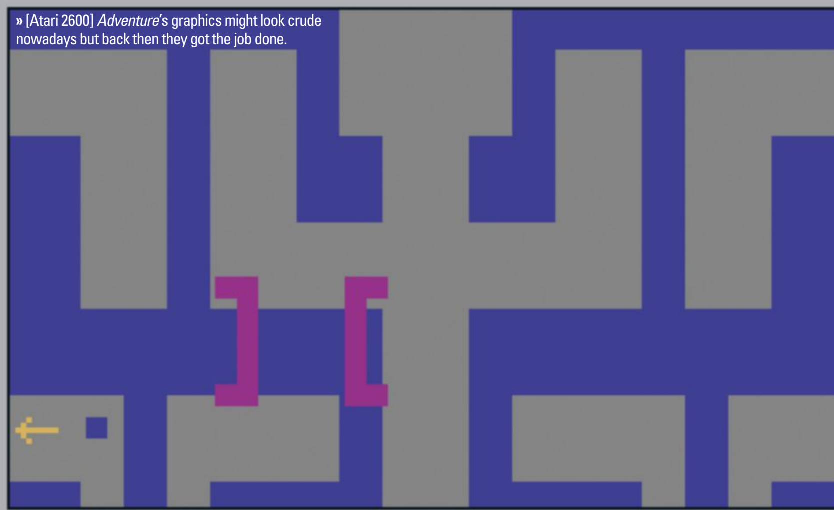
Before the release of *Adventure* in 1979 RPGs were mostly text-based, running on large mainframe computers and inspired by the pen and paper game *Dungeons & Dragons*, mimicking many of its ideas and gameplay mechanics. As time and technology moved on developers started coming up with their own ideas and player interaction with their virtual worlds became entirely visual. Typing and hoping was replaced by pressing and exploring.

Many writers cite that the graphical action-adventure game, a style of RPG typified by the likes of *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy*, can be traced back to *Adventure*. One of the 2600's most seminal games, its creator Warren Robinett had a short but impactful dalliance with mainstream gaming during his tenure at Atari: he took the decision to leave the company soon after the game's



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE (WARREN ROBINETT)
- » **RELEASED:** 1979
- » **PLATFORM:** ATARI 2600
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE



» [Atari 2600] *Adventure*'s graphics might look crude nowadays but back then they got the job done.



release, and in 1980 co-founded The Learning Company, one of the first ever software companies to set its sights on the education market.

Though Warren admits that his time working for Atari wasn't the most harmonious period in his career, he still remains immensely proud of what he achieved there with *Adventure*, a game which is as well remembered by gamers for the things that it introduced as much as the ambitious adventure it took them on. For Warren, it's an adventure that began in the early Seventies.



"I was interested in computer graphics when I was an undergraduate at Rice and a grad student at Berkeley. I got a masters degree in computer science at Berkeley in 1976." Warren tells us. "I had a pretty fun year in 1977 building log cabins, and bicycling across the country, but then I ran out of money and needed to go back to California and get a job. It was then I heard about Atari, and showed up there and filled out a job application. I wrote a little essay about why I would be perfect for them, and they hired me."

Warren's first 2600 game was the combat racer *Slot Racers*, a game of little cars driving around in a maze shooting missiles at each other. And it was when he was reaching the end of this project that he began looking for inspiration for his next game idea.

"My friend and housemate Julius Smith took me to the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Lab one day, where he worked, and we played the new sensation: the original text adventure game by Will Crowther and Don Woods. Its name was also *Adventure*, but it is more commonly known now as *Colossal Cave Adventure*. The game had no graphics, it ▶



» [Atari 2600] *Adventure* sold over one million copies, and was one of the 2600's earliest hits.

THE MAKING OF FOG OF WAR

As well as giving us the first ever videogame Easter egg, *Adventure* is also notable for pioneering the 'fog of war' game mechanic. Warren explains how he came up with the concept.

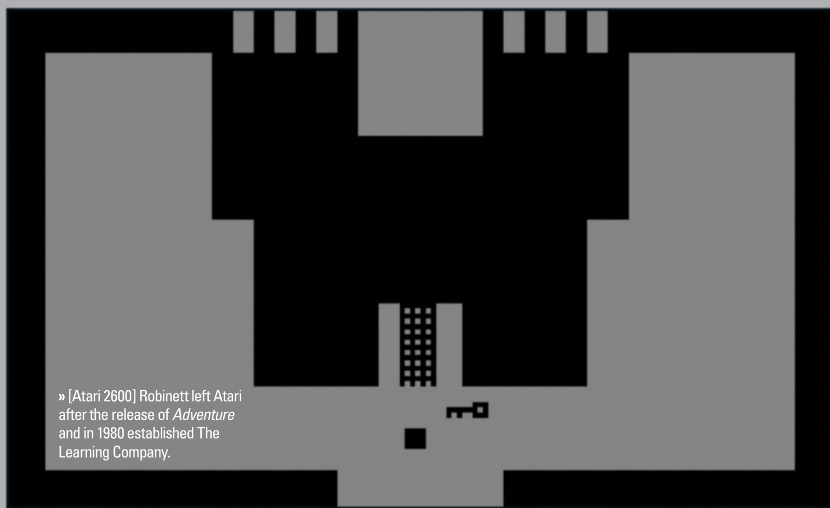
"That was my idea for making a more interesting maze. It used a video-priority trick that was based on a feature of the Atari 2600 display hardware. I made the foreground and background the same colour (grey), which would normally make the maze in the foreground disappear. But by surrounding the avatar with a large square orange object that was *between* the foreground and background, the maze was "illuminated" in a small region of the screen surrounding the avatar.



"I was actually trying to duplicate the dark rooms of the text adventure, in which you needed a lamp to dispel the darkness. So the square "circle of radiance" of the lamp was the best the 2600 could do. In the end, I got rid of the lamp object, because I only allowed one object to be carried, and if you were carrying the lamp, you couldn't carry anything else. So the "circle of radiance" just turned on in certain rooms. I called mazes of this type "catacombs". I never used the words "fog of war".

THE MAKING OF





» [Atari 2600] Robinett left Atari after the release of *Adventure* and in 1980 established The Learning Company.

was all text: you typed a command and it would execute your command, and then print out (in text) a description of where you were in the game world, and what objects or creatures were present there. I became enamoured with this concept (an interlinked network of rooms, which contained objects which could be carried from place to place, some of which allowed you to get past obstacles in the game) and thought I could transmogrify it into a videogame for the Atari 2600. My idea was to show one room at a time on the screen, and show objects in the room as little shapes on the screen, and show the player's position with another little shape."

Warren's boss though was unconvinced and felt such an idea so outlandish it needed to be quashed from the outset. A console with very limited technical resources designed to offer simple gaming experiences and basic adaptations of early coin-ops, an adventure game would certainly be a stretch for the 2600. Even the numbers agreed.

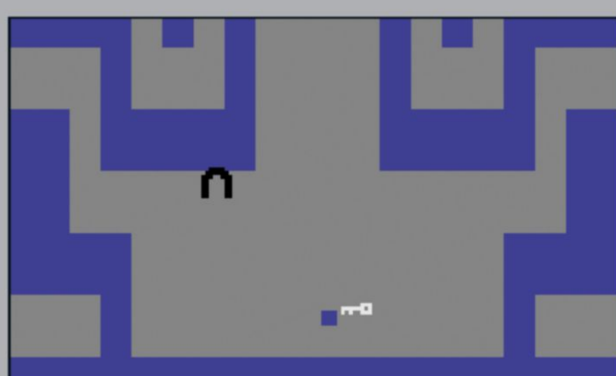
"My boss at the time knew that Crowther and Woods's game required more than 100 Kbytes on a mainframe, and we had 4K bytes on the 2600," explains Warren. "So he told me it was impossible, and not to work on it. I didn't ever convince him. I defied him by creating the prototype of *Adventure*. He told me I was 'hard to direct'. My co-worker John Dunn laughed when I told him this, and said 'I'm impossible to direct.' Most other people at Atari could see it was an interesting new idea for a game."

Like many 2600 games developed at that time, *Adventure* was a one-man show. Not only did Warren come up with the concept, he also created the story, wrote the code, drafted the manual, and created all the graphics and sound effects, working 15 hour days at various points in its development. He even arranged his own QT, testing *Adventure* out on kids until he was satisfied. But while this autonomy allowed Warren to create *Adventure* entirely in his vision, its development wasn't entirely plain sailing.

"*Adventure* took a year to create, from start to finish," says Warren. "But I got somewhat stuck when *Adventure* was in mid-development – stuck in the sense that I wasn't satisfied with the game, but wasn't quite sure what it needed. So I took a break from it for a few months, and implemented the interpreter for the *Basic Programming* cart. Then I finished up both *Adventure* and *Basic* at the same time. What I was stuck on was that it just wasn't that interesting with a network of big open rooms, and a few dragons chasing you. At that point, there were no mazes, no bridge, no bat, and no magnet. I wasn't sure, initially, that it would be possible to make asymmetrical mazes from symmetrical pieces (the maze graphics in each room were constrained to be symmetrical by the display hardware), but it turned out that you *could* make good mazes. The existence of mazes provided a reason for the bridge object to exist – to cross maze walls – and a reason to invent the magnet – to retrieve the key you accidentally dropped in a maze wall. It wouldn't have been all that great a game if I had not been allowed the time to come up with these additional elements."



» [Atari 2600] Atari's stance on not giving its programmers credit not only resulted in the famous *Adventure* Easter egg but also led to coders leaving the company to setup their own game studios – such as Imagic and Activision.



Of course, there was also the big issue of the 2600 itself, whose design goal was that it was supposed to enable the arcade games *Pong*, *Tank*, and "maybe a few other games", explains Warren. Adding that the 2600 was "the weakest possible graphics engine on which you could actually build a videogame" and breaking down the technical challenges he had to circumvent.

"The Atari 2600 had 4Kbytes of ROM memory (for program, graphics data, and sound effect data), 1/8 Kbytes (128 bytes) of RAM memory (for program variables and the stack) and a slow, weak processor: the 6502 (8-bit arithmetic, no multiply or divide instructions, no floating point, and clock speed 1.2 MHz). The graphics hardware was also very limited (just two decent hardware sprites, and a low-resolution screen with 160 x 96 pixels). It was hard to do much of anything on this system, with these resources. So it was absolutely critical to be a skilled and efficient programmer. Otherwise, you could not fit your program into the 4K."

Though previous role-playing game worlds were constructed from text, *Adventure*'s world stood out by being bright, colourful and entirely graphics based. Though gamers below a certain age will probably consider *Adventure*'s visuals to be crude and abstract, as touched on, Warren could only work with the limited tools and memory available, and this resulted in the hero of his game being a simple square and the three enemy dragons – Yorgle, Grundle and Rhindle – rather resembling something else.

"It never occurred to me that the dragons looked like ducks, at the time," says Warren. "Their behaviour, at least, was menacing – they chased you, and ate you if they caught you."

Beneath their menacing mallard-like exteriors though, they were pretty sophisticated beasts. "The dragons were actually implemented as finite-state machines." explains Warren. "A dragon had four states, which I called Chasing, Biting, Swallowed-Man, and Dead, and a different graphic for each. Its behaviour also varied according to what state it was in. Transitions between states were



» [Atari 2600] The famous Easter Egg in all its cheeky glory, marking another gaming first for *Adventure*.

triggered by game events, such as the dragon touching the player's avatar (which I called the 'Man'), or by the sword touching the dragon. I also named the bat 'Knubberub', but this name never made it into the manual. Too weird, I guess."

Given how hard Warren worked on getting Adventure the green light and made, it is understandable that he felt he should be given credit for all his hard work. But at the time Atari was notoriously against giving its programmers recognition in its games, a fact that led to an irritated Warren famously sneaking the credit 'created by Warren Robinett' into one of the rooms in the game – a cheeky act that inadvertently firmly secured his name inside videogame history books by creating the earliest known example of a videogame Easter egg.

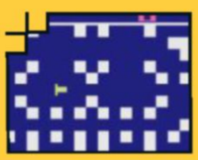
So how did his bosses react when the credit was finally discovered? "I don't know. I didn't work there any more by then," says Warren. "The other game designers were amused."

With Warren clearly something of a determined and rebellious game designer back then, we wondered if there was actually anything that he wanted to add or implement in *Adventure* but was unable to. And figuring we already knew the answer, we were surprised by the response that he gave.

"I was satisfied with it when I handed it off to be manufactured, but there *was* one thing I didn't get a chance to do. Since the 2600 had two joystick ports, but *Adventure* was a one-player game and only used the left port, it occurred to me that you could do something interesting with the other port. You could link two 2600s with a cable such that there could be two avatars, each controlled by their own joystick, and you would see each other if you entered the same room. In other words, make it a multiplayer game with two players in the same game world. I actually built the cable but I was nearly out of memory in the ROM, and did not try to implement this."

"It never occurred to me that the dragons looked like ducks"

WARREN ROBINETT ON THE INFAMOUS ENEMY DESIGN



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SLOT RACERS
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1978

MISSILE COMMAND
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1980

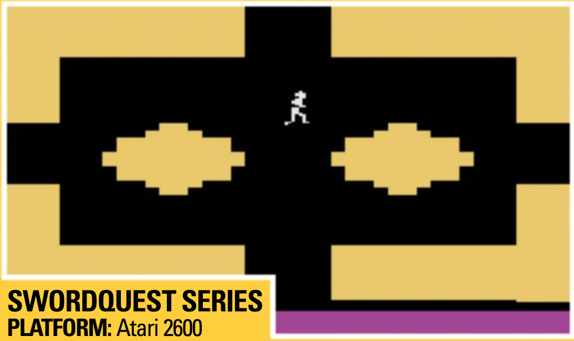
PONG
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1972

With that revelation ringing in our ears, and us now pondering how amazing the game would have been embarking on the adventure with a friend (Frodo and Samwise style), we finish up by asking Warren if he has played any of the sequels that *Adventure* inspired. He tells us he hasn't, and we can understand why. We get a sense that *Adventure* was a private and personal project for Warren, but also a testing adventure he was satisfied he'd completed and was happy to close the book on.

For more information about *Adventure* visit Warren's website: www.warrenrobinett.com

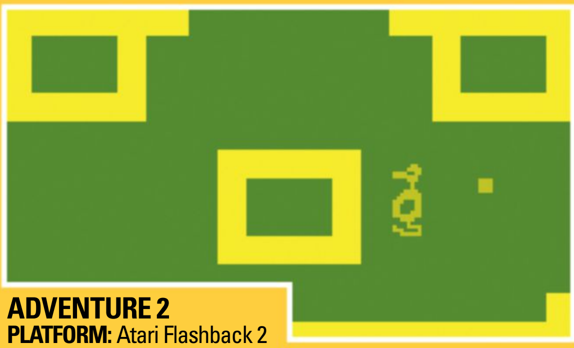
THE FURTHER ADVENTURES

Warren had no involvement in the Adventure series after the release of the first game, but the series has lived on



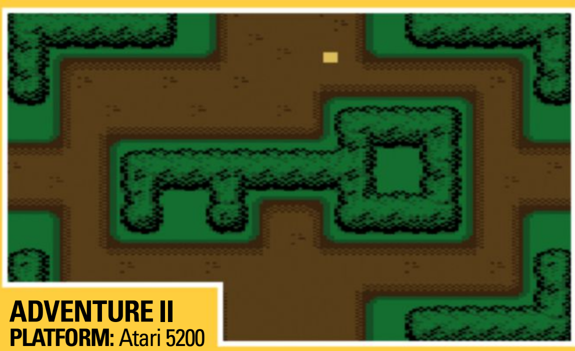
SWORDQUEST SERIES
PLATFORM: Atari 2600

■ The first sequel to *Adventure* evolved into the *Swordquest* series, an unfinished symphony of four games tied to series of competitions. The series is notable for each released episode – *Earthworld*, *Fireworld* and *Waterworld* – coming packaged with a comic book which gave players vital hints and clues needed to finish the game.



ADVENTURE 2
PLATFORM: Atari Flashback 2

■ In 2005, Curt Vendel wrote a somewhat posthumous sequel to *Adventure* for the Atari Flashback 2 dedicated console. Based on the original code, it reuses many of the object sprites – you can see the recognisable duck dragon here – from the original game but rearranges them to create an entirely new set of rooms for fans to explore.



ADVENTURE II
PLATFORM: Atari 5200

■ In 2007, Ron Lloyd and the popular Atari community website Atari Age were permitted to release a homebrewed sequel to *Adventure* for the A5200. With enhanced graphics (though your avatar is still just a square), plenty of games modes, and coming packaged with its own manual and box, it's a fine tribute to the original.











The History of Seventies Home Computers













Seventies gaming is typically remembered for groundbreaking coin-ops and pioneering consoles, but as Rory Milne discovers, the decade offered a third branch of gaming based around a then new concept – the home computer

November 1971 is an important month in videogaming for two unrelated reasons: the first commercial videogame was released – *Computer Space* – and Intel launched the first commercial microprocessor – the 4004. The 4004's more powerful successors helped pave the way for a new class of computer, dubbed the microcomputer.

By the mid-Seventies, the components required to build a microcomputer were relatively inexpensive, and kits were being sold in electronics magazines. Although these systems had little immediate impact on gaming, they nevertheless inspired future developers; Chris Stamper and David Crane both built computers during their student days, and a teenaged Archer Maclean assembled kit systems such as the Altair 8800.

In 1976, Commodore, a calculator manufacturer, bought the chip firm MOS Technology, and its senior engineer Chuck Peddle floated the idea of a consumer computer. Commodore boss Jack Tramiel gave Chuck six months to produce a proof of concept, and with time short, Chuck's colleague Petr Sehnal found two alternatives for its internal electronics – an industrial system board and a prototype being worked on at Apple. A meeting where Jack Tramiel and Apple's Steve Jobs talked money allowed Chuck and Apple's Steve Wozniak to talk hardware. Chuck envisioned a consumer appliance running BASIC, while Wozniak imagined a kit running machine code; Jack offered Steve $50,000 for his company, but he wanted $300,000. Predictably, Commodore chose the system board. Chuck then repurposed an adding machine keyboard, colleague Atsutoshi Fujiyama converted TV parts into a monitor, and a wooden case was commissioned.

The system was finished by January 1977, and was shown to John Roach from the electronics chain Radio Shack, but he passed on mass-producing the system. Jack decided Commodore would finance the computer itself, and demanded a production model be ready within four months. A monitor, keyboard and cassette recorder were chosen, then made to work with the machine's newly designed electronics. Chuck's system, the PET 2001, launched at the West Coast Computer Faire of April 1977.

The PET 2001 offered some great gaming for the time, and helped fuel Commodore's future aspirations. "The PET was basic, but its character graphics let you easily code for its display," Chuck explains, "the C-64 was that machine with good graphics, and it sold millions because of its games." The PET wasn't the only announcement made at the West Coast Computer Faire, however; Commodore had competition.

After Commodore and Atari Inc. rejected Steve Wozniak's prototype, Steve Jobs took the advice of Atari's Al Alcorn and found financial backing, allowing the pair to bring the system to market as the Apple II. Credit for the system's advanced hardware belongs to Steve Wozniak, a missing link connecting the kit computer scene to the home computer movement. But he also had coin-op design experience, having co-developed *Breakout*, and this inspired him to give his machine colour and sound. He also tested his BASIC, codenamed Game BASIC, by writing a *Breakout* homage named *Little Brick Out*.

Steve Wozniak then future proofed the system by adding expansion slots. But the Apple II also benefited from the style and management of Steve Jobs. Steve Wozniak was a gifted engineer, though something of a force of nature, but Steve Jobs bottled his lightning by monitoring his small engineering team religiously. Steve Jobs also instructed the system's design by vetoing noisy fans and visible screws, and choosing a stylish plastic case prominently stamped with the Apple logo.

The finished article was expensive, but marketed as a superior product worthy of its price. Initial sales were unimpressive, but as its software library grew this situation improved, and standout titles like *Choplifter*, *Lode Runner*, and *Prince Of Persia* all debuted on Apple's system. "There were so many interesting games on the Apple II," recalls renowned developer John Romero, "Back then it was all about experimentation, which has helped Apple II games stand the test of time. Creative programming on the Apple II helped distinguish programmers." As mentioned, though, the system was no overnight success, with price and lack of availability being factors – criticisms that certainly couldn't be made of Radio Shack's TRS-80.

"Steve Wozniak was a force of nature, but Steve Jobs bottled his lightning"



» This car themed ad shows Sweden's leading home computer.



» The unofficial mascot: a trophy-winning cartoon rally driver.



» A slick advert for the expensive, though impressively featured Apple II.

In the mid Seventies, Radio Shack buyer Don French developed a kit computer prototype in his own time and demonstrated it to John Roach, VP of manufacturing. Although unimpressed, John approved of the general premise. While travelling the West Coast, Don and John visited a microprocessor firm where engineer Steve Leininger briefed them on a new chip. Steve made a good impression, and John wanted to hire him, however his current employers vetoed discussions. Disappointed, the pair made for their next destination, a Byte Shop computer store, where amazingly Steve was working the late shift.

Things moved quickly. Steve visited Tandy headquarters and was offered a job. He accepted, and John had his team. Don and Steve would develop a prototype, but an assembled system, reasoning most consumers couldn't solder. Soon after, the CB radio market fuelling Tandy profits collapsed, and John saw his opportunity. Within a month, Steve and Don gave a demonstration to Tandy's top brass. The machine's BASIC crashed, but Tandy boss Charles Tandy showed interest, and Don and Steve requested 50,000 be produced. 3,500 were approved – the number of Radio Shack stores, so that if it flopped each store could use one for stock control. However, 10,000 TRS-80's were ordered within the first month.

The system offered low cost monochrome gaming, was available at every Radio Shack and outsold all other home computers throughout the Seventies, resulting in many great games. "TRS-80 games are still fun to play," reflects coder Bill Hogue, "unlike modern games they were made by one or two people and have a finite number of levels, but don't seem to 'end' if you finish the highest one."

Paul Terrell sold Byte Shop, a US computer store chain, in 1977, and took plans for a home computer to his friends Pete Kaufman and Howell Ivy, owners of arcade firm Exidy Inc. They agreed Paul would handle marketing and sales, Howell would assume



» Atari extols the educational value and suitability for gaming of its home computers.



» Commodore's pioneering home computer graces the cover of Popular Science.

engineering duties and the pair would collaborate on design. Howell, a skilled engineer, produced a great machine, but compromises were made. Its high-res graphics were monochrome and it lacked native sound.

Nevertheless, the Exidy Sorcerer launched in April 1978 to positive orders and reviews. Exidy did find the US home computer market challenging long-term, but impressive Dutch sales extended its lifespan and games library. In the US, Sorcerer developers such as Quality Software produced coin-op conversions and standout system exclusives. "In my mind, games were a marketing strategy," Paul admits, "because it was kids, or the kids in us, that were driving the demand."

Meanwhile, Rick Barnich was hired as director of engineering at Interact Electronics Inc. in early 1978, where he and his team developed a low cost home computer based on a prototype the firm had acquired. The desired price tag defined the system; it would have low-resolution colour graphics, calculator-like keyboard and standard television output. With a design in place, Rick ensured the production model's circuitry caused minimum TV and radio interference, and his machine, the Interact Home Computer, gained approval in mid 1978.

The inexpensive though underpowered system had failed to impress, resulting in a minimal games library and a brief US existence. However, it enjoyed a second life when successfully marketed in France by a company called Micronique. "The Interact is a footnote in home computer history," regrets Rick. "Cost targets dictated the design." Concurrently, in February 1978, Swedish firms Luxor AB – an electronics manufacturer, Dataindustrier AB – an industrial computer manufacturer, and Scandia Metric – a minicomputer wholesaler, met to assess the viability of a Swedish home computer. They agreed there was a market, and Dataindustrier's Örjan Lindblom was tasked with developing a prototype.

"Örjan's brief was to keep costs down while producing a powerful, easy to use system"

Örjan's brief was to keep costs down while producing a powerful, easy to use system. A colleague, Johan Finnved, wrote a clever BASIC for it that partially compiled programs into machine code before running them, and the system's parent companies unveiled their collaboration, the ABC 80, in August 1978. The ABC 80 eventually accounted for over 60 per cent of the Swedish market, and its games library featured some genuinely unique titles. "Aside from the graphics limitations it was a really good platform," says developer Isak Engquist.

Having weathered a Japanese calculator price war, the Sharp Corporation in the Seventies looked to develop more profitable microprocessor based products. In 1978, they launched the MZ-40K, a simple kit aimed at hobbyists, then the MZ-80K, a more advanced semi kit designed for consumers. The MZ-80K was produced within Sharp's Components Division, developers of the earlier MZ-40K, by a team managed by Kaoru Nakanishi.

A prototype was developed, then changes made based on actual usage. The often accidentally pressed power switch was moved from the front to the back of the system, and BASIC was removed from memory in favour of loading it in by cassette. Sharp called this "clean design", and it allowed alternative operating systems to be used. Crucially, it also freed up memory for games written in machine code. The MZ-80K was launched at an Electronics Show in Tokyo in June 1978.

It was an all in one system, incorporating a monitor, keyboard, and cassette recorder, with a monochrome display and highly featured font set rather than bitmap graphics. The system was a semi kit, requiring assembly rather than soldering, though later models would arrive ready to use. The MZ-80K was immediately popular, quickly gaining a 50 per cent share of the Japanese home computer market. MZ-80K gamers were soon treated to the early games of Hudson Soft, such as Bomber Man, and Enix – later of Square Enix fame.

"The abilities to scroll the screen and sync with the hardware were essential," MZ-80K notary Steve Wallis remembers, "I did the assembly, my brother did the BASIC coding. I must admit, though, I abandoned the Sharp after getting an Amstrad." Nevertheless, 1978 was Sharp's year, 1979, however, would belong to rival NEC. In 1976, bare bones kit systems developed by the Japanese electronics giant NEC were bought in huge numbers by electronics enthusiasts, but by mid 1978 NEC's competitors had begun dividing up an emerging home computer market.

Meanwhile, thousands of miles away, at the National Computer Conference in California, the main supplier of BASIC for US home computers, Bill Gates,

Seventies Home Computer Timeline

Commodore PET 2001

Year: 1977

Commodore chief engineer Chuck Peddle felt sure a consumer computer would sell well. He proved his theory with the PET.





Apple II

Year: 1977

The Apple II's prototype was a kit computer, but was redesigned for the home after Apple found an investor.

TRS-80

Year: 1977

Tandy management had no faith in the home computer concept, but reluctantly approved the TRS-80 after CB radio sales crashed.





Exidy Sorcerer

Year: 1978

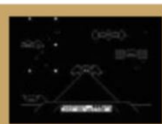
Ex Byte Shop owner Paul Terrell developed the Sorcerer with friends from the coin-op firm Exidy, but success eluded them.

The Work of the Micro Men

Many respected developers cut their teeth on Seventies home computers, the following games represent the early work of just a few of these coding luminaries



Space Ace



Mike Singleton, 1980

Alien ships sail through a sea of stars, smoothly crossing your field of vision, and a well-crafted chase and lock-on mechanic tests your targeting skills. Opposing craft exhibit unique behaviours – and victory depends on a winning strategy for each.

Star Fire



Jeff Minter, 1980

Enemy craft shriek past your ship's cockpit, blasting lasers as they go, but your return shots only count if a target is dead centre of your viewfinder, meaning precise piloting and a steady trigger finger are essential.

Stellar 7



Damon Slye, 1982

Hostile forces are warping from far off Arcturus to Saturn's moon Titan in seven short hops. Earth's last hope, an experimental vehicle, is ordered to drive the invaders back, using their warp tech to jump between worlds.



Delta Tau One



Matthew Smith, 1982

It's a shame *Delta Tau One* didn't reach a wider audience, as it respects its muse *Galaxian*, without just imitating it, leaving you wondering what might have been had the developer worked more in the genre.



River Rescue

Koichi Nakamura, 1982

Nakamura's game is a pretty accurate port of the coin-op title *River Patrol*, with graphics and core gameplay reproduced as faithfully as could be expected.





Bongo's Bash

John Romero, 1984

Bongo's Bash apes *Pac-Man*, but has several twists. You dispatch robots by dropping trees in their path, but trees are limited. Clear the coconuts, and you enter a new maze.



met an enthusiastic Japanese computer magazine publisher, Kazuhiko "Kay" Nishi.

A planned 30-minute meeting stretched to hours, following which an agreement was signed to form ASCII Microsoft. This venture would act as Microsoft's Far East distributor, though Nishi planned not only to sell BASIC for Japanese home computers, but also help design Japanese home computers.

His most promising contact was Kazuya Watanabe, a manager at NEC, and given NEC's desire to catch up with their rivals, it's perhaps unsurprising that Nishi's plan to co-operate with NEC was positively received. Watanabe found Nishi's enthusiasm infectious, and soon agreed to meet Bill Gates. Watanabe was impressed by Microsoft's dominance of the US BASIC market and convinced his superiors that NEC should develop a home computer with ASCII Microsoft.

A prototype, codenamed PCX-01, was co-designed at NEC, with Gates' software facilitating advanced colour semi graphics capabilities, and Nishi advising on hardware choices. The machine launched in September 1979, renamed the PC-8001, sold a quarter of a million units and hosted classics such as Olion80 and titles by JRPG pioneer Koei. Henk Rogers, however, has less fond memories, "I felt the 8001 was only good for text adventures. Developing for the cassette based NEC machine was tedious. Thankfully its successor, the PC-8801, came out with a disk drive while I was developing *The Black Onyx*."

Interact Home Computer

Year: 1978

Interact hired Rick Barnich to turn a prototype into a cheap home computer, but insisted he couldn't upgrade its hardware.





VideoBrain Family Computer

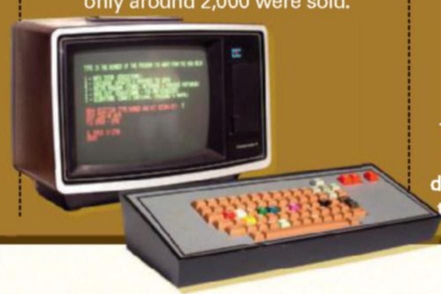
Year: 1978

The VideoBrain was something of a glorified console, it did have a keyboard, but was cartridge based and lacked BASIC.

Compucolor II

Year: 1978

Successor to the industry orientated Compucolor, the Compucolor II was quite advanced but expensive, and only around 2,000 were sold.





ABC 80

Year: 1978

Three Swedish technology firms developed the ABC 80 for their domestic consumer market, which the system went on to dominate.

Image courtesy of Anders Sandahl.

Seventies System Exclusives

Gaming's formative years offered some unique experiences via coin-op, console and computer. These are just some of the more interesting titles produced exclusively for Seventies home computer systems



Cosmic Jailbreak

System: Commodore PET 2001
Developer: Derek J. Hipkin
Year: 1980

The aliens in *Space Invaders* always win, but here the invading hordes have been defeated and imprisoned. Reinforcements plan a rescue mission, targeting a jail occupying the centre of the screen. Your assignment is to shoot down the invaders on each side of the prison before they tear it down!



I/O Silver

System: Apple II
Developer: Brad Wilhelmsen
Year: 1984

You must develop a Super Computer by assembling six sets of colour-coded microchips into components, and combining these into a completed system. However, your project has bugs, which physically manifest to harass you. *I/O Silver* offers arcade and strategy modes, both very addictive.



Meteor Mission 2

System: TRS-80
Developer: Bill Hogue
Year: 1980

Astronauts are trapped by a meteor storm that you must negotiate before touching down on a landing pad. Your ship has only space for one passenger so multiple trips are required, with lasers being your one way past obstructive meteors. *Meteor Mission 2* has great graphics and compulsive gameplay.



Vairos

System: Sharp MZ-80K
Developer: Masami Nakamura
Year: 1984

You can't help but be intrigued by Vairos' subtitle: 'Difficult Robot War'. An attractive side scrolling shooter rewards curiosity and pushes your robot fighter's skills to the limit. Raising your shield proves useful in tight spots, but spitting out laser blasts with pinpoint accuracy is the key.



Olion80

System: NEC PC-8001
Developer: Akira Takeuchi
Year: 1983

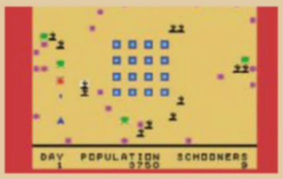
All Space Force trainees must complete a mission on the flight simulator. Candidates must visit five star systems, taking down ten enemy craft and a command ship per system, in under ten minutes using limited fuel. Tactical elements add depth, while its scaled visuals are highly effective.



Getaway!

System: Atari 400 / 800
Developer: Mark Reid
Year: 1982

Getaway! reminds us that it's as much fun playing robber as it is playing cop. Aside from snatching dollar bills, your day's thievery is dictated by an onscreen guide – with typical targets being diamonds or armoured vans. But watch for patrol cars, and remember to refuel at the gas station.



Tombstone City: 21st Century

System: TI-99/4
Developer: John Plaster
Year: 1981

Entice a deserted city's population back by ridding the area of creatures called Morg. Morg spawn among desert cacti surrounding the city borders, where you are stationed. Simple mechanics ensure frantic gaming, complemented by bright and cheerful aesthetics.



Arrows and Alleys

System: Exidy Sorcerer
Developer: Vic Tolomei
Year: 1980

You're tasked with driving hell for leather through dark alleyways, blasting arrows and rockets. Your opponents pose a constant threat as you career around tight corners and along straights, and although function is put before form, that function is executed perfectly.



Le Baroudeur

System: Interact Home Computer
Developer: Algorithme
Year: 1984

Jumping from a plane, you parachute towards a lost temple hidden in jungle below. Stealing the temple's treasure, you narrowly escape its guardian. Blocky graphics leave little for the gameplay to hide behind; fortunately, this is the game's greatest strength.



Hoppert

System: ABC 80
Developer: Isak Engquist
Year: 1984

Lost in low gravity deserts on Mars, your only means of transport is a malfunctioning Hoppert. This damaged vehicle can't be steered or slowed down, but can perform small, medium or large hops to clear differently sized dunes and structures. While a simple premise, the end result is anything but.

Sharp MZ-80K

Year: 1978

Sharp's system established the home computer market in Japan, and theMZ-80K rapidly gained a 50 per cent share of the sector.





Hitachi MB-6880

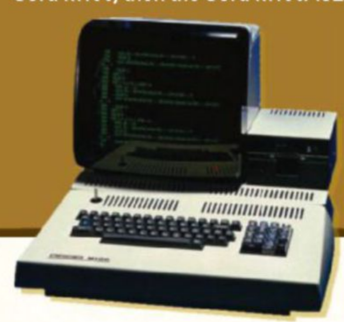
Year: 1978

The MB-6880 is something of a Japanese "also ran" that never matched the sales of the MZ-80K or the PC-8001.

Sord M100 / M100ACE

Year: 1977

Having developed several business microcomputers, Sord entered the consumer market place first with the Sord M100, then the Sord M100ACE.





NEC PC-8001

Year: 1978

A focus within NEC on kit computers changed when a partnership with ASCII Microsoft resulted in the consumer oriented PC-8001.



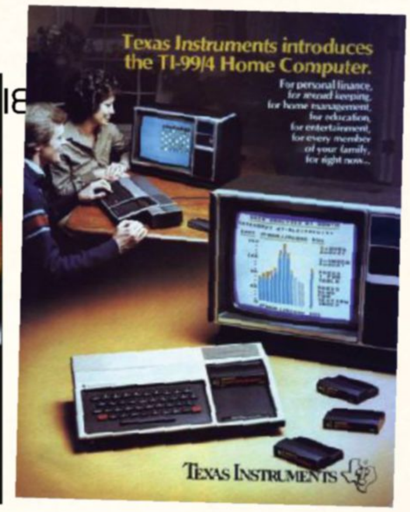
» The Exidy Sorcerer appealed to the interested but cautious prospective home computer buyer.



» A groovy Seventies advert for NEC's first consumer computer, the PC-8001.



» Sord let the M100ACE's cool Seventies design speak for itself.



» The TI-99/4A ad was aimed at the more technically minded consumer.

During the early Seventies, Atari dreamt up innovative coin-ops, and in 1975 it launched a popular home version of Pong. 1976 saw Atari sold, in order to raise funds for a home system based around separate cartridges – the VCS, which launched the following year, but Atari, having often suffered from imitation, were wary of complacency. Development of their next project commenced immediately, steered by VCS team member Jay Miner. Jay envisioned a VCS replacement based around custom graphics and sound chips.

By February 1978, however, profits were down in the Consumer Division where he worked, and a businessman named Ray Kassar was hired to increase takings. Home computers were selling well, and they, as much as rival consoles, preyed on Ray's mind. He decided Jayr's project should be rethought, with two home computers being the new objective.

The low-cost 400 would compete with Atari's console competitors, while the more expensive 800 would be Atari's flagship in the home computer market. As 1978 progressed, electronic devices were prohibited from interfering with TV and radio reception, meaning Atari would have to shield its machines and undergo lengthy approval processes. Atari's systems were announced in early 1979, but didn't gain approval until July.

But production problems meant they weren't launched until November. Game developers hedged their bets, and wrote code compatible with both systems. Notable 400 / 800 firsts were *Miner 2049er*, *Boulder Dash*, *Dropzone* and *Ballblazer*. "The Atari machines had cleverly designed graphics and sound hardware," Lucasfilm games director Peter Langston enthuses. "It was possible to do amazing things, as is visible in *Ballblazer* and *Rescue On Fractalus!* We experimented to get the best possible performance."

Far from Atari's Californian warehouse, though, a Texan firm had developed equally advanced tech.

"Atari dreamt up innovative coin-ops, and in 1975 launched a home version of Pong"

Texas Instruments gained a near monopoly of the US calculator sector in a 1975 price war; its advantage had been the almost ubiquitous calculator CPU – the 4-bit TMS1000. In 1976, they released its successor, the 16-bit TMS9900. It was intended to leapfrog rival 8-bit chips, but this expensive processor sold poorly, giving TI a dilemma.

By 1977, it was decided TI's consumer products group would develop a low cost TMS9900 based home computer. Its first consideration had to be recruitment, but tempting experienced computer engineers away from San Francisco proved nigh on impossible, and so engineers from the group's calculator division were appointed instead.

The project saw one manager quit and a second replaced the following year. TI's chip group then set the per-chip cost at five times that of rival 8-bit chips to improve its group profits. A second poor decision would discourage third-party games: the proposed system wouldn't support machine code development. Prospective developers would instead have to buy a $50,000 TI mini computer. In early 1979, a component allowing TI's computer to connect to a TV was found to cause interference, meaning an expensive monitor would have to be bundled with each machine.

TI's system, the TI-99/4, was first announced in June 1979, but, as with Atari, production problems in this relatively fledgling industry meant it didn't hit the shelves until late 1979. Its games library was underwhelming, but a cheaper, improved successor, the TI-99/4A, faired better and saw many interesting exclusives. "Programmers had to use 'tricks' to gain better results, but in its price range the 99/4A truly was superior as a game platform," recalls TI-99 coder John Phillips. "To this day, followers still revere the system."

Following the Seventies, home computers competed in a survival of the fittest. While the Eighties saw a home computer boom, the Nineties witnessed an implosion, as long-standing manufacturers dropped like flies. Correspondingly, while Eighties home computers provided a bewildering choice of gaming, their Nineties counterparts represented a more streamlined gaming proposition, with a handful of major players dominating the marketplace. As the decade faded, so did the era of the home computer. IBM PC compatibles and Apple Macs had become computer gaming's new torchbearers.

Atari 400

Year: 1979

Designed to compete against rival's games consoles as much as other home computers, the inexpensive 400 featured a membrane keyboard.





Atari 800

Year: 1979

The 800 was Atari's flagship in the developing home computer market, but it struggled against the similarly speced Apple II.

TI-99/4

Year: 1979

Texas Instruments hoped the TI-99/4 would take over the US market, but they alienated developers then lost a price war.





Apple II Plus

Year: 1979

Essentially an enhanced Apple II, the Plus boasted a six-colour display, 48K of memory and the Applesoft BASIC operating system.

"Special thanks to Anders Sandahl, Terry Stewart at classic-computers.org.nz, and Marcin Wichary, Kuba Bojanowski, Paul Lowry, Adam Jenkins and the Digital Game Museum for additional photography help".

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come





INFO

- **Featured System:** PS2
- **Year:** 2001
- **Publisher:** Sony
- **Developer:** SCEJ/Team Ico
- **Key People:** Fumito Ueda (director, lead animator, character design, game design), Kenji Kaido (producer)

GO DEEPER

- **The American release of *Ico* used a different, much-maligned boxart to the painted one seen in Japan and Europe – it was subsequently ditched when the game was re-released on PS3.**
- **A big point of inspiration for *Ico* was *Another World*, which has tonal similarities to the PS2 title.**



32.

ICO

A sign of gaming's growing storytelling maturity, Ico is a lonely and compelling adventure that gave the PS2 its first cult classic…

THE BACKGROUND

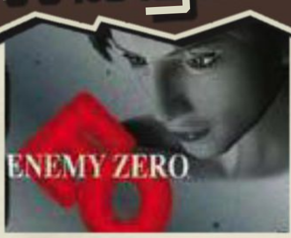
The four-year development cycle of *Ico* began when Fumito Ueda showed a short movie to Sony, encompassing the basic idea of *Ico*: the castle, the able lad and the enigmatic princess were all there, with sunlight pouring into open environments along with shadowy halls to contrast them. Ueda, who taught himself to animate, sought to tell the story through his characters' expressions. Kenji Kaido, who'd overseen the big hit *Ape Escape* for Sony, teamed up with Ueda to bring his vision to life.

Ico was made by a super-small team of just 20 people, with Ueda reluctant to give up control of too many aspects of the product – he took on the role of lead artist, designer and creative director and often stayed overnight to get the game done. Originally destined for PSone with a slightly less ethereal look (Ico didn't originally have horns but Yorda did, though the castle seemed largely the same) the game shifted development to PS2 and a more coherent visual style emerged, a result of the team's make-up of mainly artists and programmers. While critically acclaimed from the moment it was released on PS2, *Ico* performed poorly at retail, becoming a collector's item until popular demand led to a reprint to coincide with *Shadow Of The Colossus*, the team's next title.

THE GAME

Ico is a sad, lonely trek through a cavernous castle that sees a boy, exiled from his kingdom because of the horns on his head, escorting Yorda, an enigmatic princess, out of the fortress in which they're both imprisoned. On the surface, there's not really a lot more to it – as Ico, you're keeping Yorda alive as you go, fending off shadowy beings that try to drag her into the darkness. Essentially, *Ico* is a five-hour escort mission broken up by extended, smart puzzles, but this relatively easy game is defined by its overwhelming sense of atmosphere, with an eerily beautiful world that underlines the mournful tone of the story.

Things of note



Ueda's origins

Fumito Ueda's first game was actually *Enemy Zero* on the Saturn and PC, released in 1996. The director has been overseeing his own projects since then.



Ico on PSone

Ico was originally destined for release on the PlayStation – there's plenty of footage out there of the original version, and it certainly looked too ambitious for Sony's first hardware.



Ico's mystery language

Ico had its own alphabet developed by the team at SCEJ, spoken by Yorda, who doesn't share the same language as Ico. Hence why their communication is always so brief…



Ico: 2001, 2006, 2011

Ico was initially very hard to find in the UK, with only 50,000 copies out there – it has subsequently been re-released on PS2 in 2006 and on PS3 in 2011.



Missing co-op mystery

Shipping on a CD-ROM in the States as opposed to a DVD, like we got in the UK, the post-completion co-op in *Ico* was actually missing from the NTSC version of the game.



» **[PS2]** *Ico*'s very specific washed-out colour scheme would be maintained in the team's subsequent projects.



» [PS2] Ico's first meeting with Yorda is certainly one of modern gaming's more iconic moments.



» [PS2] The origin of the cursed horned children is explored in spiritual successor/prequel *Shadow Of The Colossus*.

What the press thought



Play
Score: 90%
"The save-the-girl-and-solve-the-puzzles game is a true modern classic."

Gamespot
Score: 8.5
"The game is undoubtedly driven by its smartly crafted aesthetic mood, though its production never compromises the gameplay it provides."

Looking at it now, the most forward-thinking touches are the lack of a HUD and, far more importantly, the economy of cutscenes in telling the story. There's not a lot to know beyond the reasons why Ico and Yorda are imprisoned – but their emerging bond and your interactions in keeping her safe creates something that really beats anything a cutscene can provide. Sure, it sounds a little emo, and yeah, *Ico* definitely falls into that bracket of games that deliberately aim to provoke sad feelings from the player. But those moments are well-earned, particularly later in the story where it really gets tricky to solve puzzles while keeping Yorda safe and you've spent more time with both protagonists.

As you learn more about the background of the castle and Yorda's true nature, *Ico* becomes somewhat heartbreaking, particularly in its closing hour when you get the sense your young hero is too naïve to really know what he's up against. That's the brilliance of *Ico*, really – mechanically, it's a quality puzzler/platformer hybrid with some seriously smart environmental brainteasers, but your empathy for the hero's plight, and the relationship that organically grows between the two characters is the real appeal to this masterpiece. The bizarre, always windswept pocket universe in which the game is set is just fascinatingly put together, and you only ever feel like you're getting a tantalisingly small glimpse at the whole picture. You know about as much about what's going on as Ico does; it's an effective means of showing rather than telling with storytelling that builds a connection with your hero's mindset.

This world and its characters are why everyone always argues for Team Ico's games as examples of art, of course. That's certainly a pointless overall argument due to the fact it's been overplayed and endlessly unresolved, but the reasoning behind that kind of opinion is obvious: *Ico* definitely transcends the sum of its familiar parts in the telling of Ueda's story.

Players experience something they don't get anywhere else that makes them feel like they've stumbled across some kind of milestone in narrative design. That's just a positive reaction, full-stop, and while we should never feel like we have to justify games to people who don't really get them, there's plenty about *Ico* that's worth arguing for in the face of critics who doubt the legitimacy of interactive storytelling, seen recently in games like *The Walking Dead* or *Journey*. For the rest of us, it's another sign that the evolution of interactive storytelling is always making positive progress.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Ico and its spiritual successor, *Shadow Of The Colossus*, invoke similar feelings in the player through the bleakness of their shared universe, but *Ico* is unique because of the attachment it forges between you and its characters. The small details in animation really make this feel like a forward-thinking game – watching Yorda chasing birds away or admiring the sights are the only clues you really have to go on with this travelling companion, and it's a far richer way to portray a character than detailing a massive backstory or relentless voiceovers funnelled through bad actors.

This is reserved, smart and timeless storytelling, the likes of which we can still only see in trace forms across modern videogames. *Ico*, for that reason, is a genuinely mature work. It gives us a mystical world where we're forced to fill in the blanks, and a gameplay dynamic that makes us think beyond the basic categories of the genres it crosses into. Contemporary games like *The Last Of Us* or *BioShock Infinite* owe much to *Ico* in terms of the way developers think about AI companions, and finding a balance that means such games never feel like extended escort missions – *Ico* got that just right. That dynamic between player and AI reached its next logical stage with this title.

THE HISTORY OF CHASE H.Q.

"Let's go, Mr Driver!" With that immortal line we were introduced to Chase HQ and its tale of hero cops and hightailing criminals. To tie in with the game's 25th anniversary, Martyn Carroll looks back at one of Taito's most successful and memorable creations







Just how good was Taito in the mid to late Eighties? The Japanese firm's name is ingrained in gaming history thanks to *Space Invaders* – the seminal 1978 release that effectively ushered in the so-called golden age of videogames – yet Taito's own golden period occurred almost a decade later. Consider this: the company developed and distributed *Arkanoid, Bubble Bobble* and *Darius* in 1986; *Rastan, Rainbow Islands,* and *Operation Wolf* in 1987; and *The New Zealand Story, Operation Thunderbolt* and *Chase HQ* in 1988. Nine top titles, and that's not including several great games that lurked at the back of the arcade, often overlooked. Games like *Full Throttle*.

Full Throttle was Taito's riff on Sega's *OutRun*. Released in 1987, and known as *Top Speed* in some territories, it was a checkpoint racer where you ragged a red sports car along epic highways that twisted and dipped and sometimes split off in different directions. Just like *OutRun*. The one chief addition was a turbo boost button. Each boost would deliver a few seconds of maximum speed – perfect if your time was ticking away and you needed a push towards a checkpoint.

Full Throttle designer Hiroyuki Sakou would re-use the turbo boost to fantastic effect in his next project for Taito, *Chase HQ*. However, this was to be no leisure drive. A clue to Hiroyuki's key inspiration was literally signposted in *Full Throttle*. Most of the billboards that lined the side of the road were for other Taito games, but there was one



» Ocean's Bill Harbison produced the graphics for both the Spectrum and Amstrad versions.



» [Arcade] The famous *Miami Vice* shot seen in *Chase HQ* forerunner *Full Throttle*.

bearing the legend 'Manhattan Vice', and it was accompanied by a well-known publicity image from the US cop show Miami Vice. That's right – it was Crockett and Tubbs, resplendent in their silly pastel suits, standing beside a black sports car, brandishing firearms. Cue the Jan Hammer theme!

In *Chase HQ*, the espadrilles of Sonny Crockett and Ricardo Tubbs were filled by Tony Gibson and Raymond Brody, two undercover cops working for the Manhattan Police Department. As part of the special 'Chase' unit, they had to peruse fleeing criminals in their turbo-powered Porsche-alike and smash them into submission. So essentially the game was another against-the-clock racer, in that both the initial pursuit and eventual takedown had to be completed before the timer hit zero.

Yet the mission-based nature and the cops and robbers theme – along with the sleazy 'vice' vibe (your first target, for instance, was the cheery sounding 'Idaho Slasher') – ensured that *Chase HQ* was much more interesting and engaging than *Full Throttle* and other checkpoint racers. Graphically the game was no slouch either. It ran on Taito's Z System which had previously powered the F1 driving game *Continental Circus*. The hardware featured two 68000 chips – one of which was almost exclusively employed to draw the rolling road. The result was a smooth, super-fast game that rivalled anything running on Sega's celebrated *OutRun* hardware. A YM2610 sound chip provided the foot-tapping title tune and some entertaining speech, including the comedic chatter from Brody and instructions from police dispatcher Nancy. ▶



» [Arcade] Handy chopper guy tells you which way to go at the junction.

Chase HQ began popping up in arcades in November 1988 in both stand-up and sit-down variants. The stand-up cab was far more common (in Europe at least), and it came with either a 19 or 25 inch monitor and memorably featured flashing police lights in the marquee panel. The gaming magazines were impressed with Taito's new title. "At last!" wrote *Computer And Video Games*, "A racing game with something more to do than just whizzing round a track to beat the course time. Fast paced and challenging with great graphics, *Chase HQ* is definitely a winner." *ACE* magazine was also impressed: "The *OutRun* theme keeps being expanded and presented in different ways and *Chase HQ* is the best so far. Driving and violence may not mix too well in real life, but it's a winning coin-op combination."

In the April 1989 issue of *Crash* magazine, Mark Caswell commented: "This is the ultimate arcade version of cops and robbers and I can't wait for the Ocean conversion." That's right, Ocean had quickly snapped up the home conversion rights and was busy preparing the game for various computer formats. The game was released in time for Christmas 1989 and the versions ranged from the awful (Commodore 64), through the average (Atari ST, Amiga), to the exceptional (Spectrum, Amstrad CPC).

The celebrated Z80 versions were developed in-house at Ocean, with Jon O'Brien writing the code and Bill Harbison drawing the graphics. Bill recalls the initial buzz that surrounded the game: "I knew there was something special about *Chase HQ* when the machine was delivered to the studio. Normally if we were working on an arcade conversion we'd be sent the motherboard with the game on it and nothing else. This time we got the full arcade cabinet with the seat. It was huge and generated a lot of interest in the building."

Still, he was not daunted by the task of cramming the impressive coin-op onto the 8-bit computers. He says: "I had just finished working on *WEC Le Mans* so I had experience of drawing car graphics and animation, and knew I could make a good job of the conversion. I was introduced to Jon who was going to be programming the conversion and he seemed like a nice guy and I thought we'd work well together."

Bill remembers Jon setting out his stall almost immediately. "After a few days he called me and some of the Ocean programmers over to his desk to have a look at what he'd been working on. He'd managed to rewrite the *WEC Le Mans* game engine that generated the twisting, turning road and make it more than twice as fast. I think that after seeing that demonstration a few people decided they had to up their game. The next thing to overcome was when the road split and the player had to decide which side to take. Again Jon took that in his stride and easily wrote up the code to do that.

"Even when the main part of the game was complete, he managed to save so much memory that we could have the animated titles from the arcade, synthesised speech and congratulatory sequence when the game was completed. We did our best to make our versions as special as possible and we knew that we had a great game at the end of the project. We only hoped that other people would embrace it and enjoy our work." That hope appeared to be a given, as magazine previews and the reviews that followed were overwhelmingly positive. "The journalists who came to look at the game were knocked out by it," says Bill. "We weren't worried about whether it was going to be a success because we knew that our game was better than any other racing game available on those platforms. It's one of the games I'm most proud of and I felt lucky that I had a chance to work with Jon because he clearly had an incredible talent." Between 1990 and 1993, versions of *Chase HQ* appeared on home consoles and other computer formats. In the arcade, Taito wasted little time in capitalising on the game's success and a follow-up appeared in late 1989. However, it had a new title – *Special Criminal Investigation*, or *SCI*, rather than the expected *Chase HQ II* – suggesting that it was developed as more of a spin-off to sit alongside the still popular original than a direct replacement.

SCI ran on the same Z System hardware as *Chase HQ* and the game didn't stray too much from the original's winning formula. Once again there were five missions, although this time a single storyline – involving the mayor's kidnapped daughter – tied them all together. In *SCI* the driving action was more outrageous and over the top, with ramps and obstacles littering the route. Oncoming traffic was added too, and some sections were affected by bad weather. However, the key addition to the game was guns. The boys' new Nissan Z-style sports car featured a T-bar, allowing Gibson



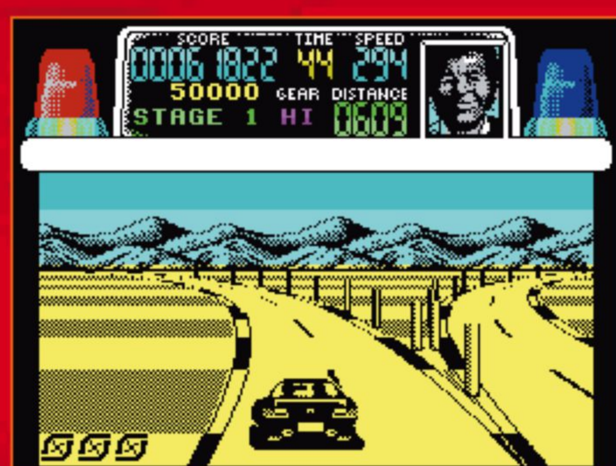
» "I still have a copy of the game here in my office," says Grant Harrison, "but sadly no C64 to play it on. I keep getting outbid on eBay!"



» Let's be honest here, there's no way that police uniform is regulation.

"We knew we had a great game at the end of the project. We only hoped that other people would embrace it and enjoy our work"

BILL HARBISON, ARTIST



» [Spectrum] Bill Harbison on their version of *Chase HQ*: "I look at it now and see flaws, but at the time there wasn't a racing game to beat it."

» [Arcade] This is where it all begins, in the pleasant, leafy suburbs.



» [Arcade] The identity of the target vehicle is ever so subtly alluded to.



CONVERSION CAPERS

Of the 14 home versions of Chase HQ, which ones deserved the coffee and donuts?

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Following the disappointment of US Gold's *OutRun*, it seemed that the Spectrum was no longer able to do justice to the latest big name coin-ops. This masterful conversion quelled that idea. Fast, playable and unexpectedly faithful.



AMSTRAD CPC

■ Very similar to the Spectrum version but there's no sign of a lazy port here. Speed is comparable and the liberal use of colour gives this version the edge. Jon and Bill really redlined the CPC hardware with this one.



MSX

■ The MSX-1 release is almost identical to the 48K Spectrum version, perhaps running a touch slower but not noticeably so. There exists an unofficial hack for the MSX-2+ which runs at double the speed. Eye-popping stuff.



COMMODORE 64

■ It's easy to rip into rubbish coin-op conversions. Maybe too easy at times. But this awful effort from Teque really deserves the criticism. It's basically the Spectrum version, complete with colour clash, running at a snail's pace.



ATARI ST

■ Teque also handled the ST and Amiga versions, and while they're far better than the woeful C64 version, they still suffer from sluggish speed and unresponsive controls (cornering is trickier than it should be). Disappointing.



AMIGA

■ There's hardly anything to choose between the ST and Amiga releases. The screenshots look great, but when running it's a bit of a banger. It appears to be an ST port that doesn't really take advantage of the Amiga hardware.



GAME BOY

■ No one expected great things from the GB version, but creating a game that doesn't make you want to smash the cart with a hammer would have helped. Unfair, annoying and just… endless. Seek out *Super Chase HQ* (1994) instead.



NES

■ Not a bad effort this. It's certainly fast – so fast that you whizz past traffic like something out of Atari's *Enduro*. It also adds a new feature where you can spend points you have accumulated on upgrades for your car.



MASTER SYSTEM

■ Similar to the NES version. It's fast and playable, though the visuals are a touch more polished than on the Nintendo console. However, the road is completely flat – no hills or dips! The Game Gear version is identical.



PC-ENGINE

■ A great conversion for the NEC console. Visually it's very faithful to the coin-op, and perhaps the only thing that lets it down slightly is the rather erratic road movement. You can play it now on Wii Virtual Console.



SHARP X68000

■ This enigmatic Japanese computer was home to some cracking coin-op conversions but *Chase HQ* was definitely not one of them. The perspective is wrong and the road moves much faster than roadside objects. Don't bother.



FM TOWNS

■ Released in 1993 for the Japanese FM Towns range, this was the most faithful conversion to date in terms of speed and scale. There's just one curious omission – no tunnels! And let's face it, we all love a good tunnel.



SATURN

■ Both *Chase HQ* and *SCI* were released as a double-pack in Japan and they're pretty much arcade perfect. The transitions between terrains (like the dirt track on the first stage) could be smoother, but nothing to moan about.



PLAYSTATION 2

■ Those looking for an arcade perfect version of *Chase HQ* would find it here, in 2007, on the *Taito Memories II Gekan* pack for the PS2. Sadly the game wasn't included on Taito collections released outside of Japan.



CATCH ME IF YOU CAN

Nancy at Chase HQ needs you to collar these law aversive miscreants

1. THE IDAHO SLASHER

WANTED: *On suspicion of first degree murder.*



■ Ralph the stab-happy stalker is fleeing toward the suburbs in a white British sports car that looks like a Lotus Turbo Esprit (but isn't really, Mr Lawyer). The 2.2L car is capable of 238KPH.

2. THE NEW YORK ARMED ROBBER

WANTED: *On suspicion of robbery and murder.*



■ Carlos the blagger has been spotted on the freeway driving a yellow supercar that a short-sighted person might mistake for a Lamborghini Countach. The car has a 5.0L engine and a top speed of 315KPH.

3. THE CHICAGO PUSHERS

WANTED: *On suspicion of selling drugs.*



■ These shady characters are hotfooting it out of the city in a silver German sports car that clearly isn't a Porsche 911. The car's 3.3L engine delivers 288 horsepower; maximum speed is unknown.

4. THE LOS ANGELES KIDNAPPER

WANTED: *On suspicion of abduction.*



■ This nameless offender is speeding towards the outskirts of town in a blue two-seater sports car that's absolutely NOT a Ferrari 288 GTO. His 5.0L motor is able to reach speeds of 305 KPH.

5. THE EASTERN BLOC SPY

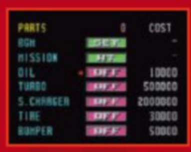
WANTED: *On suspicion of espionage and murder.*



■ This secret agent working undercover in Washington is seeking refuge in the suburbs. His vehicle is initially unknown, but intelligence suggests it might be a red Porsche 928. Except it isn't. Obviously.



» [Mobile] *Chase HQ 3D* was released on select mobiles phones in 2007.



» [SMS] A novel idea in the Master System version saw you trade points for upgrades.

to pop out of the roof and fire his handgun at bad guys. Shooting was actual more of a gimmick, as it was possible to finish most of the missions without firing a single shot, but it was a pretty neat gimmick. And once you'd played *SCI* for a while, the original did feel a little bit, er, impotent in comparison.

One amusing element was the characters' changing appearance in the game. If Gibson was supposed to be based on Don Johnson in the original, in *SCI* he resembled a grizzled, burnt-out Rutger Hauer with cop-on-the-edge written all over his face. Brody had bulked-up too, although he retained his inherent smoothness; the kind of guy who'd turn up to a funeral wearing white khaki pants.

Ocean unsurprisingly picked up the home computer rights, and equally predictably re-titled it *Chase HQ II: Special Criminal Investigation* to make its sequel status obvious. This time Probe handled conversion duties and the game appeared on most home computer formats in late 1990 (bar the belated and elusive Amstrad CPC+ version which really needs its own article – like the one in **RG** #46). The quality of Probe's conversions nestled somewhere between average and mediocre, but there was one exception – the Commodore 64 version, which was released on cartridge. Programmer Grant Harrison and graphic artist Steve Crow did a fine job of making amends for *Chase HQ* on the C64.

Despite the scale of the sequel, Grant wasn't worried about messing up as Teque Software had done with the original conversion. "I usually managed to find a good way to get things to work," he says. "However the only previous driving game I did was the Paris section from *A View To A Kill* and the less said about that the better!"

Grant received some welcome technical help from Mark Kelly who had coded the

"I usually managed to find a good way to get things to work"

GRANT HARRISON, PROGRAMMER



» [PlayStation] Battling it out with robots from the future in *Ray Tracers*.



» [Arcade] Nancy returns in *SCI* – yet outside of Japan her name was bizarrely switched to Karen.

excellent C64 version of *Turbo OutRun*. "I remember having a talk with Mark who worked for Probe at the time and offered some good ideas about the road rendering. I think the biggest challenge was probably the huge helicopter which was made up of raster split sprites, but worked well in the end. Actually the development went pretty smoothly. I was always rewriting my code to be as optimised as possible – you had to in those days. I don't think it needed the cartridge as it all fitted into the standard memory allocation."

Zzap!64 certainly liked the game, awarding it 93 per cent – a higher score than it gave the Amiga version. "I was very pleased with it in the end, and especially when it got such a great review in *Zzap!*. It's certainly one of my favourites and I did enjoy the programming challenge." *SCI* was later ported to the PC Engine, Master System and Mega Drive. The MD version, known as *Chase HQ II* in US and *Super HQ* in Japan (there was no PAL release), was something of an oddity, being only loosely based on the arcade game. There was no shooting for a start and you were given the choice of three different vehicles at the beginning of each mission, including a turbo-powered truck no less.

Back in the arcade, Taito dropped Gibson and Brody into a decent *Rolling Thunder*-style shooter called *Crime City* which came out around the same time as *SCI*. It wouldn't be until early 1993 that the pair would get behind the wheel again in *Super Chase: Criminal Termination*.

For the third outing, Taito shook things up but nothing settled quite right. The shooting from *SCI* was removed, so shunting criminals was once again the order of the day, and the action was viewed predominantly in the first-person. From the off, the game proceeded to throw all manner of daft obstacles straight into your face and the result was more of a dodge-'em-up than a racing game. It was all very inane and uneven, but fun for a few minutes at least, though it's telling that *Super Chase* wasn't ported to a single home system. There was a 1993 SNES release titled *Super Chase HQ* which also adopted a first-person view, but it dispensed with the silliness and setpieces, returning to the straightforward pursuit gameplay of the original.



» [Arcade] We never had this trouble with Ralph the Idaho Slasher.

In 1997, Taito would resurrect the series on the PlayStation with the release of futuristic-themed *Ray Tracers*. The game played and looked a lot like *Ridge Racer*, except each race ended with you having to ram a rogue mech into oblivion. While the gameplay was clearly indebted to *Chase HQ*, *Ray Tracers* also featured a direct link to the series: one of the four playable characters was none other than an aged Raymond Brody (although his name was misspelt 'Blody' in the game manual and the character select screen).

A new *Chase HQ* title arrived exclusively on the Game Boy Color in 2000. Subtitled *Secret Police*, the handheld title introduced an element of strategy in that you had to first apprehend the offender on a city map screen. When one of your operatives snared the target, the familiar road battle would commence. One nifty addition was a versus mode where you could link up two Game Boys and have one player chasing and the other attempting to flee.

2007 saw the release of two *Chase HQ* titles. The first, *Chase HQ 3D*, was a pocket-sized retread for mobile phones. However the second was a full-blown arcade update of the original simply titled *Chase HQ 2*. As you'd expect the sequel was fast, sleek and shiny, with a strong *Burnout* flavour (which was fair play seeing as the Pursuit Mode introduced in *Burnout 2* was basically *Chase HQ*). To its credit Taito didn't tinker with the gameplay too much – it was essentially *Chase HQ* with extra graphical grunt behind it. Two cabs could also be hooked up for head-to-head play.

The problem with both of these releases was availability: the first was restricted to a small subset of mobile phones and the second was an arcade-only affair, and let's be honest, the arcades aren't exactly prevalent, or indeed particularly relevant, these days.

It begs the question as to why Taito – or rather Square Enix, who acquired the company in 2005 – hasn't done more with the series in recent years. *Chase HQ 2* would surely generate interest as an online download for those seeking a quick arcade spin. Even more puzzling is the absence of the original *Chase HQ* and *SCI* in the West. Both games were released on the Saturn, but only in Japan, and neither title was included on the more recent *Taito Legends* compilations (whereas the Japanese *Taito Memories* series *did* feature them). The only release of note is the PC-Engine conversion of the original game which was added to Wii Virtual Console in 2008.

Chase HQ deserves attention. It is, after all, a series that's become part of popular videogame culture; a series that shows just how good Taito was back in the day.

“ I was very pleased with it in the end, and especially when it got such a great review in Zzap! ” GRANT HARRISON, PROGRAMMER



CHASING PIXELS

Popular Z80 programmer Stephen Crow, who also developed Starquake and Firelord, reveals how he created the graphics for the Commodore 64 version of SCI

How did you become attached to the conversion? What previous work had you done on racing games?

■ I had worked on *Turbo OutRun* for the C64 for Probe Software and having completed the graphics for that, *Chase HQ 2* came up. I was naturally a good choice to work on that game. We had solved most of the technical problems on *Turbo OutRun* so it was much simpler to tackle *Chase HQ 2*. We used a similar technique for the road, the cars and buildings and so on.

Was it a relatively pain-free process or can you remember any significant challenges?

■ Time was the main challenge. I had about three weeks to do all the graphics for the game! As far as I can remember Probe got the coin-op game and I went through and photographed the entire game for reference. The hardest part was making the main car look good. For the road I used the one from *Turbo OutRun* and added extra lanes.

Were you pleased with how the C64 version turned out?

■ Considering the amount of time I had and the limited capabilities of the C64, I think it came out pretty well. Grant Harrison did a great job with the programming and I'm sure Mark Kelly helped out with some of the technical challenges.

Did you enjoy working on the conversion, or would you have preferred to be creating original games?

■ I didn't mind working on the conversion. It would have been nice to have had a little more time to polish the graphics and gameplay. I'm sure Grant was also on a tight schedule and the conversion could certainly been improved with more development time.



» [Game Boy Color] Shooting returned in the enjoyable handheld outing *Chase HQ: Secret Police*.



» [SNES] More first-person fun in *Super Chase HQ* on the Super Nintendo.



In the chair with…

CHRIS HUELSBECK

Known for his extensive catalogue of game soundtracks and audio CDs, Chris Huelsbeck is a composer much loved by fans of classic gaming. In this exclusive Retro Gamer interview, he delves into his love of music, recalls his first experiences with computers, and talks about how samples changed videogame music forever

SOME PEOPLE NEVER really figure out what they want to do in life, but Chris Huelsbeck wasn't one of them. From an early age, composing on family pianos and listening to pop songs, he imagined a future career in music. When the C64 arrived, with its built-in synth, Chris's drive and passion ensured his interests dovetailed nicely into a career that thrives to this day. His work has graced such titles as Turrican II, Apidya and R-Type, and you can check out more of his compositions at huelsbeck.com, on iTunes and other digital music stores, and at chrishuelsbeck.bandcamp.com



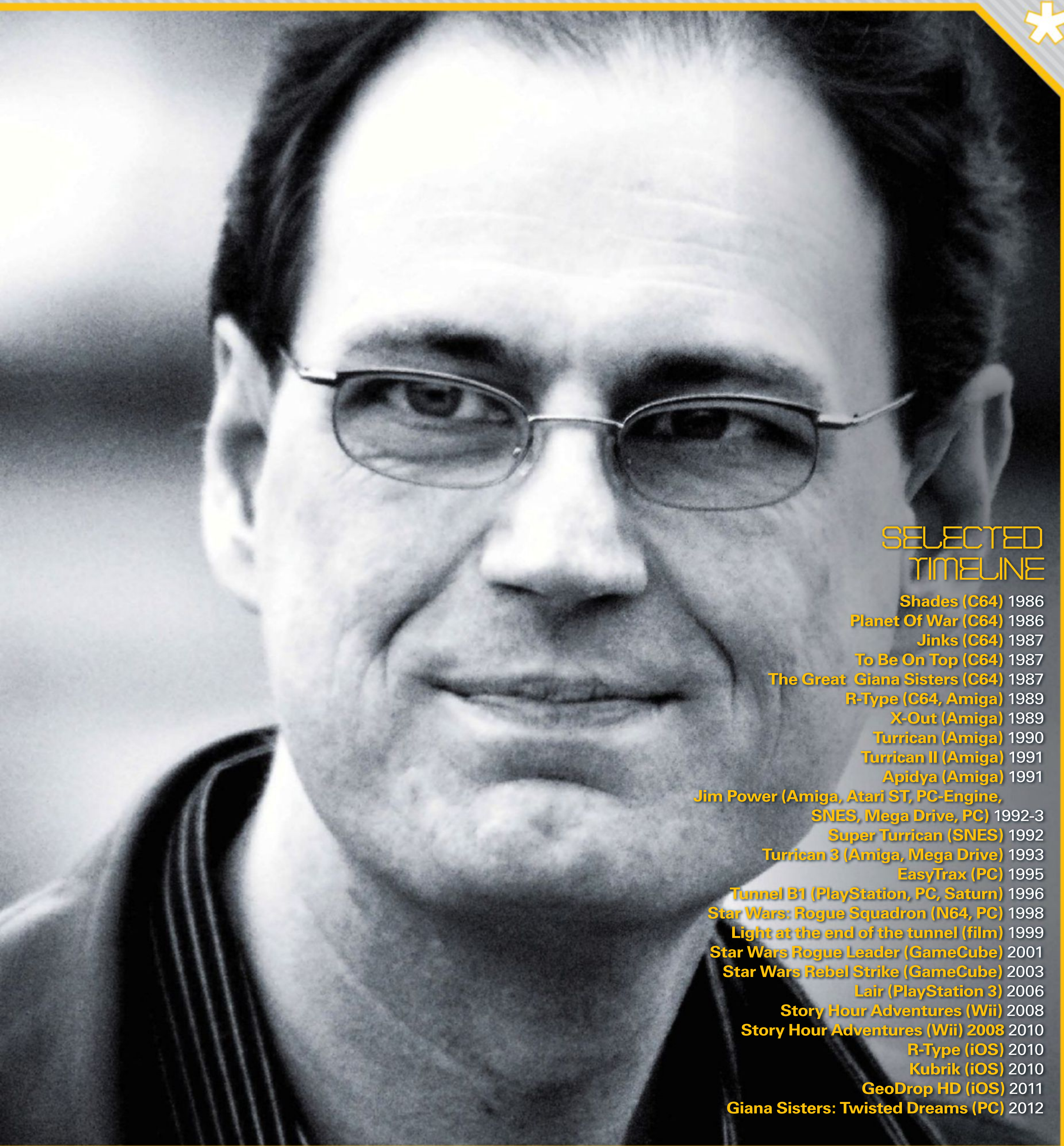
When did you first start to play music?
I grew up in a musical family. My grandma, aunt and mum were all piano teachers, and so we always had pianos in the house. From an early age, I'd hammer away on the piano, and they tried to teach me classical, but it wasn't that much fun for a young kid. I wasn't interested in playing what someone else had written years ago, but in developing my own ideas or trying to figure out tunes I'd heard on the radio.

What bands were you into when you were younger?
First of all it was The Beatles, but I had an epiphany when I heard *Popcorn*. It really caught my attention because of the synthesiser it used for the melody. Maybe if you'd grown up in the Sixties, the revelation was the electric guitar, but I grew up in the Seventies and Eighties, and so for me it was the synthesiser. From that point, I listened to every kind of electronic music and totally wanted to do something like that myself, but the machinery was so expensive, and our family couldn't afford it. I did get hold of some electronic organs that I modified. Making new connections created new sounds, but that was it until my teenage years!

How did computers come into this?
I played arcade games all over town, and my uncle got an early office computer. I played with that, and taught myself BASIC. But at the same time, I was still interested in electronic music and started volunteering at a music shop in town. It was run by a nice old guy who'd bought in all these machines because they looked cool. He'd let me play with everything and fashion a little studio in the back room, and in return I'd help him sell synthesisers to customers. They weren't mine though! Then I saw an advert for a Commodore 64 that mentioned it had a real synthesiser sound chip with three oscillators, different waveforms, and a filter. I was amazed, because no other computers had that. I knew immediately that was my ticket, because although the computer was expensive, I could save up enough money to buy one. Months later, I was shopping with my grandma and still a hundred Deutschmarks short. I almost bought an Atari 400, because I couldn't stand not having my own computer any more, but my grandma intuitively knew I was drawn to the bigger machine, and she helped me out. I bought my C64, and the rest is history!

When did you start using the C64 to make music?
For the first year, I mostly played games, but I started to program BASIC and then assembly, so I could create action games. My goal was to become a games designer, but my skills weren't great. Fortunately, I'd also started to use assembly to make music with the sound chip, and that's where my talents came out.

At what point did you make the link between games, music and making a career out of it?
A friend had sold a game, *Planet Of War*, to a British company, but he didn't do sound, and so I teamed up with him. That was when a lightbulb went off in my head that this could be a career. *Planet of War*'s release got delayed a year, but shortly after



SELECTED TIMELINE

Shades (C64) 1986
Planet Of War (C64) 1986
Jinks (C64) 1987
To Be On Top (C64) 1987
The Great Giana Sisters (C64) 1987
R-Type (C64, Amiga) 1989
X-Out (Amiga) 1989
Turrican (Amiga) 1990
Turrican II (Amiga) 1991
Apidya (Amiga) 1991
Jim Power (Amiga, Atari ST, PC-Engine, SNES, Mega Drive, PC) 1992-3
Super Turrican (SNES) 1992
Turrican 3 (Amiga, Mega Drive) 1993
EasyTrax (PC) 1995
Tunnel B1 (PlayStation, PC, Saturn) 1996
Star Wars: Rogue Squadron (N64, PC) 1998
Light at the end of the tunnel (film) 1999
Star Wars Rogue Leader (GameCube) 2001
Star Wars Rebel Strike (GameCube) 2003
Lair (PlayStation 3) 2006
Story Hour Adventures (Wii) 2008
Story Hour Adventures (Wii) 2008 2010
R-Type (iOS) 2010
Kubrik (iOS) 2010
GeoDrop HD (iOS) 2011
Giana Sisters: Twisted Dreams (PC) 2012

In the chair with...

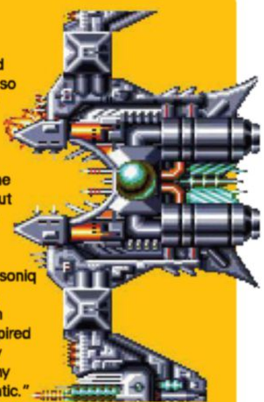
FIVE TO PLAY

Chris Huelsbeck has delivered some truly scintillating soundtracks over the years. Here are some of our personal favourites

TURRICAN II



THE *TURRICAN* SERIES was heavily inspired by Japanese arcade and console games, and so it should come as no surprise such titles also inspired the soundtracks. "Those Japanese games had this very fast-paced rock kind of style, but with a synth sound behind it. That really spoke to me," recalls Chris, who says he "created melodies and basically just rocked out on the machine." At the time, his studio was growing, with a mixing board, effects units and synthesisers, enabling many sounds to be brought back into the Amiga. "I had an Ensoniq ESQ-1, which gave me a lot of analogue-type sounds, and there was also a Korg M1, which had a lot of natural-sounding instruments. Inspired by movie soundtracks by John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith, Alan Silvestri and Hans Zimmer, my music around then also became more cinematic."



GIANA SISTERS: TWISTED DREAMS



THE CENTRAL THEME in *Twisted Dreams* is being able to switch between two sisters, each of which has a distinct personality. Said switch dramatically affects their environment, and Chris realised the same had to be true for the music. "Machinae Supremacy had done this remix of an older *Giana Sisters* tune with their heavy metal sounds. I loved that piece and asked them if they'd be interested in doing 'the other version' in *Twisted Dreams*," says Chris. "We'd compose each 'cutesy' version of a tune and send it to Machinae Supremacy for their take, in exact sync. You cross-fade between the two and the effect is striking and smooth." The end result is a fantastic collaboration between the two artists that adds massively to the final game.

R-TYPE



CHRIS NOTES THAT although *R-Type* wasn't lacking music in the arcades, it didn't have any title music, and this wasn't really suitable for the various home systems at the time. His work on this particular game spans decades, since he worked on the C64, Amiga and iOS versions, all of which are very different in terms of style and structure. "I always try to do something that's appropriate for the specific platform," he explains, noting that it wouldn't have made sense to have simply ported music from one system to another. Chris recalls that all three versions of the game were fun to work on, and all were well received, but he's particularly fond of the Amiga soundtrack, which was his first cinematic-style project. It's a great choice as well, further highlighting just how skilled Chris was on the 16-bit home computer.

STAR WARS: ROGUE SQUADRON



ELSEWHERE IN THIS feature, Chris notes that this was almost a 'step back' for him, in that the N64 lacked an optical drive and instead used cartridges: "I was brought on board because the team needed my expertise to get something that sounded like *Star Wars* movies out of sample memory." As a huge fan of John Williams, he was at the time "excited and terrified" and "wanted to treat the music with the respect it deserved, not butcher it". At the time, he was very critical of this work, but Chris now actually likes how it turned out. We're glad that he's finally happy with his finished work as we have great memories of it from back in the day. It's a stellar soundtrack that captures the essence of the movies and ties in perfectly with the game's many aerial dogfights.

JIM POWER



THIS TITLE WAS pretty diverse from a gameplay standpoint, at times being a side-scrolling platformer, and at others turning into a side-scrolling or top-down shooter at specific points. Chris recalls that this was probably the most-ported game music that he's worked on: "I composed it on the Amiga, the Atari ST, the SNES and the Sega Mega Drive." He notes that, unusually for the time, the game also differed little between the different platforms. "There's also a CD version I did in the studio," he adds, which came out on the PC-Engine release, with its built-in CD. Similarly to *Turrican*, *Jim Power*'s soundtrack riffs off of fast-paced Japanese arcade music that was popular at the time. It's a fantastic piece of work, easily complementing the fast-paced action found throughout the game

I finished the music for it, I saw a contest in German C64 magazine *64'er*. They wanted readers to send in music programmed and played on the SID chip, and I immediately thought I'd enter. My aim was to get into the top-ten, to get on to the cover disk. I created a new sound program, sent it in and, to my surprise, won.

And that was *Shades*, right? How did you go about creating that?
I just sat there with a machine code monitor and typed in hexadecimal numbers in a pattern that I had thought up for how music would be represented in the memory – the sound definitions and everything that my player was parsing and converting into music. It was super-tedious, and I remember the last night. I'd done fragments to test the player, but that's all. I sat there until 4 in the morning, finishing it. I had to go to school – I was only 17 at the time – and so after two hours of sleep, with red eyes, I begged my parents to put the disk in the mail for me, otherwise I'd lose my slot in the contest. Two weeks later, I found out I'd won.

Were you converting piano compositions or building tunes directly inside the C64?
I built everything inside the machine, and it came down to what my programming could do. I'd say those first C64 pieces weren't songs but medleys of special effects, but I always had an ear for catchy

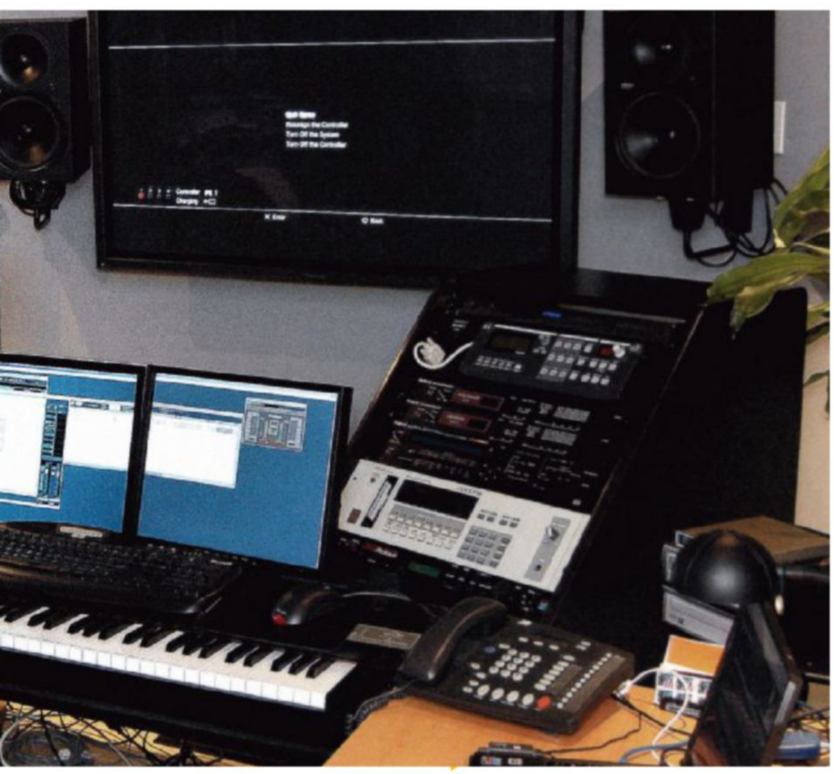


» Although modern-day compositions from Chris are all created inside the computer, he's still surrounded in his studio by synths and mixers.

melodies, so that helped too. It was very intuitive – I'd cycle some bass notes and that would maybe inspire me to play some melody over the top – but the sound always came first. Today, I'll often do the opposite and sit down with a piano sound to develop a melody before moving back to the computer.

What did you think of the SID chip?

At the time, after the initial excitement of something that I'd achieved technically wore off, it was never enough. I was always aware of the limitations of three voices, and that bugged me because I knew I could do better with more. I was always looking for the next trick to enhance the sound and break through those limitations. But for a while it was satisfying and the SID chip has a special place in my heart.



How did your career progress?
After *Shades*, I remained in contact with the magazine guys, and the editor said he'd like to make music like mine but he couldn't program. That inspired me to enhance my player into an editor suitable for anyone – for example, you'd type A-3 for an A in the third octave, which simplified things. That became *Soundmonitor*, which I sold to *64'er*, and was pretty much the granddaddy of the modern tracker program. I contacted Rainbow Arts, then the biggest games developer in Germany. I played some tunes down the telephone and asked if it had any work for me. It offered an in-house position, and so I stopped school and started work. I knew this was my calling and that I didn't want to pursue an academic career. In the first year, I did a bunch of games, and developed the digi-track enhancement, playing samples by exploiting a SID sound chip trick.

Was that done in parallel to Martin Galway's work on *Arkanoid*?
[Laughs] Well, that's another story. I'd finished my system and used it on four games at Rainbow Arts, but they weren't ready. We then got *Arkanoid* and I was shocked because the music sounded similar to what I was doing. I wasn't that annoyed, but I was a bit miffed in having had my system laying around for months on end that I couldn't show to anyone because I was waiting for the games to be finished, and then Martin Galway gets his fourth voice! I have to say, though, his system was quite a bit different and in some ways more primitive. He didn't play samples but tiny loops of memory with different values in them that sounded a bit like samples. I had real samples – bass tones, drums – that could be played as long as you had the memory, and they were used to great effect.



» [Amiga] *Turrican II*'s music remains so well regarded that Chris in 2012 funded a Kickstarter to rework the entire soundtrack as part of a limited-edition box-set.

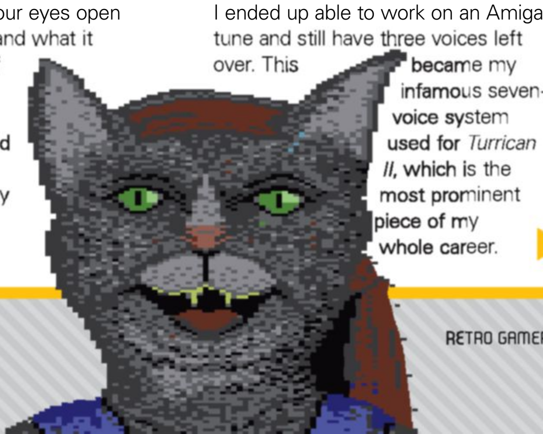
Did using samples change the way you composed?
For me, it was mainly about drums – you couldn't represent them well with the SID chip. I wanted that addition of rhythm and to have more space in the music, but it was still very much SID-driven. Also, I was at the time listening to a lot of pop music with synths, which influenced my writing.

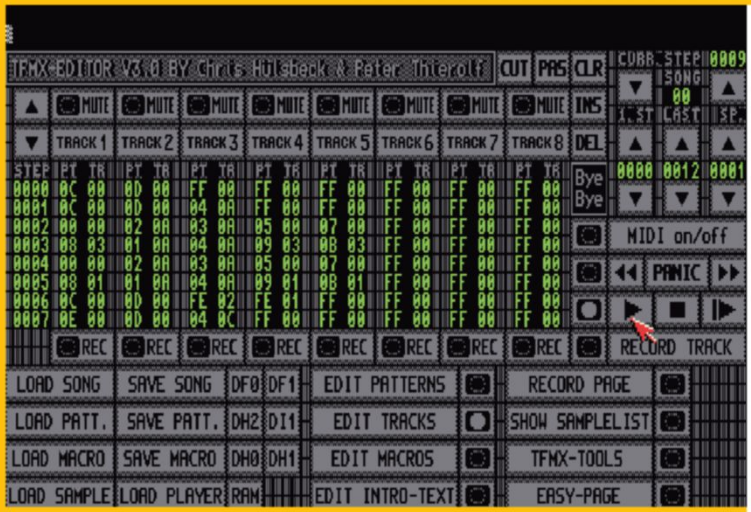
So does that mean you were by that point creating songs rather than medleys of effects?
I would say so, especially for *Giana Sisters*. The main theme that plays during the title screen – not the menu – was one of the first 'songs', which had an intro, verses and chorus sections. It didn't deviate throughout into something different just because I wanted to introduce a new effect.

How did moving onto the Amiga change your music?
You had to keep your eyes open for the next thing and what it offered in terms of possibilities. With the Amiga, it was huge that you could use samples of a much higher quality than on the C64. You could sample real instruments and full chords, and it became more rhythmic. This trumped everything else, because I could take whatever was in my head and put it into the machine – there was a real sense of freedom.

You also worked a little on the Atari ST. What did you do to get great sounds out of the machine?
That came a bit later as we moved to multi-platform. The way I did it was I had a colleague who put the Atari ST sound chip on to a board, so that you could put it into the Amiga. I could program the sound driver on the Amiga and port it easily back to the Atari ST.

So the way you created great Atari ST music was by using an Amiga?
[Laughs] Yes, but this crossover was really interesting, because Jochen Hippel translated some of my tunes to his own Atari ST sound system, which was really efficient and emulated the Amiga sound chip. When *Turrican II* was in development, I wanted to take the music to the next level and had the idea of porting Jochen's code back to the Amiga, which would then output four simulated Amiga voices through one channel. There were programs like OctaMED that had eight voices, but to me they sounded grainy and lacked the full quality of an Amiga voice, especially in the high frequencies. But with Jochen's help, I ended up able to work on an Amiga tune and still have three voices left over. This became my infamous seven-voice system used for *Turrican II*, which is the most prominent piece of my whole career.





» [Amiga] Chris's TRMX software on the Amiga was also used as the basis for many of his compositions for consoles.

What did you do after that?
The next platform that came about was the Super Nintendo, which had eight sample voices. I was thinking each platform was getting exponentially better and better, but when was enough enough? It's almost never, right? But I continued to use my Amiga player, TFMX, to do all my Super Nintendo music. I could work with my seven-voice system, and there'd always be a couple of channels reserved for sound effects.

I also did some work on the Mega Drive, which had a very interesting concept. It had an FM synth chip, which had six voices, and then it had a PSG chip for Master System compatibility. You could use them both at the same time, and on top of that there was a digital/audio convertor that we played four-bit samples through. We mixed everything together and had all these voices with very different characters. It could be tedious but also fun to play with that machine.

So did subsequent systems free you from almost all limitations?
Well, after the Mega Drive was the first PlayStation, which was able to play Red Book audio from the disc. By that time, I'd amassed a pretty sizeable studio, with a room full of machinery and high-end stuff. I'd already been using it on the CD soundtracks I'd been working on for a few years by that point. So by the time the PlayStation arrived, I had all the sounds to make an almost Hollywood type of soundtrack. The first one I did was *Tunnel B1*, and that had a very cinematic type of feel, with lots of orchestral elements.

I did go a bit back on this once, for *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron*. The N64 used cartridges, so I had to again work with sample memory. Originally, that US gig was only supposed to last a year and I was going to return to Germany, but I stayed and am now in my 15th year here!



Recently, you seem to have returned to smaller productions in mobile gaming. What was the reasoning behind that?
The economic crisis caught up with us and Factor 5 had to close at the end of 2008. I was kind of tossed on to the street and in the US that's kind of scary because the social services are not great here. On the other hand, I thought I'd just go freelance again, but it wasn't easy in the beginning. In the first year, I got barely any projects and was living off of savings. But I got an iPhone game about a year later – *ZombieSmash* – which became a big hit. I was paid well, and I then did a whole bunch of mobile games. They've been a lot of fun because the teams and games are smaller, and you're quicker done with it. It felt a bit like the early days. It's a little bit scary, the whole freelance thing, but over the last two years it's gotten much better and I have high hopes for the future.

We often hear games industry veterans enjoy mobile because they can get on with what they want to rather than slaving away for years on a game that might not be released…
Exactly. Also, the industry was developing into that direction of the Hollywood studio model, where you pull together hundreds of people on a project for a certain amount of time, aiming only at triple-A productions that are fighting for limited space. The whole iOS and mobile gaming ecosystem opened up a new chapter for smaller teams and smaller games. For a while, I was thinking gaming was unsustainable and not necessarily what the consumer wanted. Sure, there are hardcore gamers complaining if a game ends after four or five hours, but, for me, I don't have the time to invest in a huge game. I don't sit down any more for weeks to play one title. Sometimes, I just enjoy putting on *Angry Birds* and having fun with that for a short while. This new market is exciting stuff and it opens possibilities for lots more people.

> **"** The music industry is hard, and so I built my own studio and released a CD myself **"**

What kit are you using these days to compose music?
Nowadays, music in games is mostly streamed. You put MP3s into memory, and so there are no limitations at all. I produce the music in my studio, though my studio itself has shrunk again in the sense I'm not using big hardware rigs. I still have a lot of those modules, but they're just sitting around catching dust and looking cool! But all the music is happening virtually.

I have a powerful PC that simulates all those classic machines and can drive a whole production inside the computer. My main tool is Steinberg Cubase. I have hundreds of plug-ins, and they give me anything I could ever wish for. In fact, I'm now often enhancing it with live recording of electric guitars and other instruments… I've even done some orchestra recordings over the years.

Aside from working on games, you've also done a lot of rerecording and remixing of your old game soundtracks. What inspired you to return to your previous work?
First off, when I started this whole adventure as a teenager, my dream was to make music and get it out there. I really wanted to release music on a record, and so I worked on that. However, the music industry is hard, and so I built my own studio and released a CD completely myself – the first *Shades* album. I continued to do more because it's fun. I definitely had some success, and I continue to this day putting out EPs of things like *ZombieSmash*. It's just another outlet for me, and I can do the music exactly as I want on CD or MP3, with no constraints in terms of how something works within the confines of a game.



» [C64] *To Be On Top* really showed Chris's love of music.

» [Amiga] The music in *Turrican II* perfectly matches the onscreen action.





NUMBER *CRUNCHING

Chris was born in **1968** in Kassel, Germany

Chris was **17** when he won the 64'er SID competition, and he's now worked in the industry for more than **25** years

According to Chris, **4** Rainbow Arts games were awaiting completion with his digi-track system within; all were beaten to market by Arkanoid

Released in **2008**, Symphonic Shades is a **70**-minute orchestral concert of Chris's work

At the 9th Annual Game Audio Network Guild Awards in **2011**, Chris received the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award and joked: "I'm not **75** yet – I thought this sort of thing was for old people!"

The Turrican Soundtrack Anthology needed **$75,000** for successful funding on Kickstarter but ended up with **$175,534!**

In **2012**, Chris won the Best Sound award for Giana Sisters: Twisted Dreams at Deutscher Entwicklerpreis (German Game Developer Awards)



» [iOS] Since Factor 5's closure, Chris has returned to freelance, working on various mobile titles like this one.

How did the *Turrican Soundtrack Anthology* Kickstarter project come about?
A friend of mine did all kinds of albums and gigging, but he didn't have the funds to do his latest album, and so he did a Kickstarter. Crowdfunding wasn't even on my radar then. I just thought "Cool, I like his music, and I'll give him a few bucks." To my surprise, he got all the funds for his project, and another lightbulb went off! For years, people had been asking me when the next CD was coming, and I was looking at the reality of producing an album, getting it pressed, storing it until it sells… but it didn't look that good. Contrary to what some fans might think, I haven't made it yet to a point where I can say "Okay, I can retire!" I'd also had more success just releasing music on to iTunes and similar services, and not having to worry about all the other stuff around it. So I didn't know if I could even create another album, and I also have to work to pay the bills, which means I can't work ahead of time and hope someone buys an album later.

I figured crowdfunding could be a possibility, though. If the fans really wanted something, they would support it and we'd do something together. The idea sat there for a while, but then the *Double Fine Adventure* Kickstarter got really big. I realised I'd let my project slide for too long and that it was 'now or never'. The campaign was put together over the next two months and it was nail-biting. I thought maybe it would be a huge disappointment, but it turned into a big success. I saw the interest of the fans was still there and we got more than double the original budget.

How's it coming along?
I hit some bumps on the road, as usual with such a monstrous project. We're now planning to ship in June, but it's all coming together and I think in the end the fans will be really happy with what they're getting. It's certainly not a project that could have been made in this form if it wasn't for them and Kickstarter. It's a labour of love, and also enough time has passed for me to revisit that material and not be turned off because the memory was too fresh, or because of hardship or whatever. I'm working on it daily and it's a lot of fun.

What can people expect from the music side of things?
I'm very meticulously recreating the experience. I did another album in 1993 with *Turrican* material, and that was one of the initiators for the *Turrican Soundtrack Anthology*, because people said the old album was far from complete and they wanted a volume two. That triggered this whole project. The 1993 album was also kind of a playful adaptation but nowhere near faithful – I took a lot of liberty with the pieces. This time round, I wanted to be much more faithful to the original compositions. They're still enhancements, but they're not total reinterpretations or remixes. I took a lot of care and even loaded the original pieces into an emulator to figure out exactly how I played or programmed the tunes, and then recreated them with better sound. Also, for people who missed out on the Kickstarter, there will be a chance to buy the album. We can't produce more of the limited box-set, because we promised the Kickstarter backers it would be exclusive to them, but there will be digital releases and possibly CD-on-demand.



» [C64] The Giana sisters weren't great enough to fend off Nintendo's lawyers.

What are your impressions of modern videogame music?
You know, I hear people lamenting today's game music and saying it lacks melodies, but I disagree. Music today is more about enhancing ambience – it's more incidental music – but the melodies are still there in a *Halo* or an *Uncharted*. It's just people think back to their childhoods, and what they experienced back then has a bigger impact now they're older and more grown.

Finally, what do you think is the secret to your longevity in the industry?
People often ask me how they can make it in the industry. You must build personal contacts, so you've a relationship with the people who make the games. If you count on sending in demo reels, they'll just end up in the 'circular' file and will never be listened to. But if you're sure you've got the talent, the next most important thing is tenacity. You just have to keep working at it and not give up. If you really want it, you'll make it happen. I just knew this was my calling and that's why I'm still making game music today.



Klax

MORE NINETIES THAN 2 UNLIMITED AND DOUBLE DENIM

» RETROREVIVAL



» ARCADE
» ATARI GAMES
» 1989

Play *Klax* with your eyes closed and it's a pretty bizarre sounding game. Its audio comprises a mixture of whipping noises, words from a sultry sounding female voice, and the sound of a yelping man, which gets played whenever one of your tiles falls to the floor. In fact, we're sure there are probably a few lovers of *Klax* with thin walls who probably got a few disgusted looks from their neighbours after a session of the game.

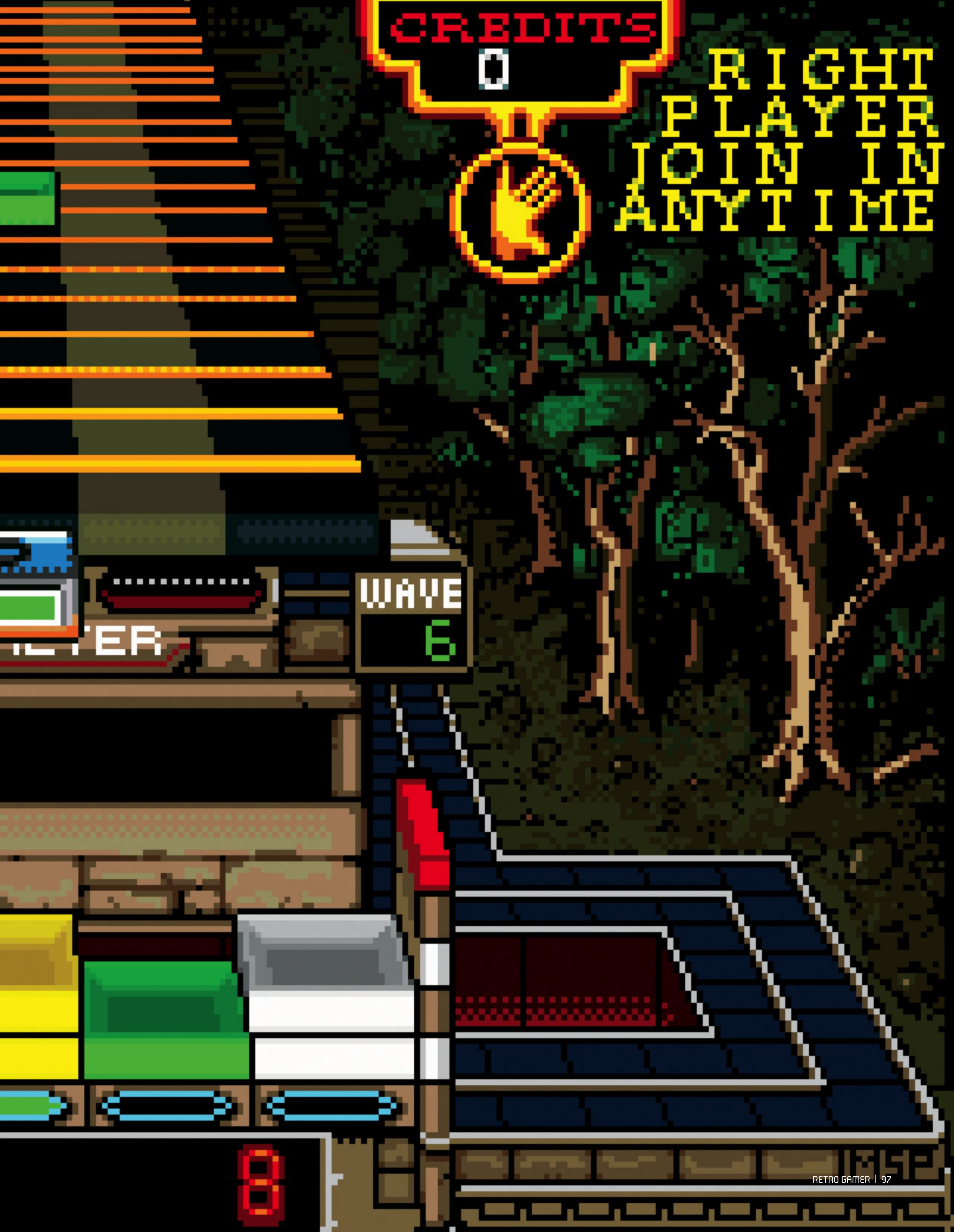
Silliness aside, *Klax* is a splendid twitch puzzler and, like a great many classic puzzle games, has lost none of its charm since its release. It has also enjoyed a staggering number of ports too, from the 7800 to the TurboGrafx-16. One of the standouts for us being the excellent Lynx port, and the most bizarre was the version that somehow managed to find its way to the monochrome screens of the Game Boy.

For the *Klax* unversed, it's a match-three puzzler with a twist. Different coloured tiles gradually make their way towards you on a conveyor belt. Using a tipping paddle that's positioned at its base you must plonk and stack the tiles inside a 5x5 container to form Klaxs: set of three titles of the same colour. A Klax can either be made vertically, netting you 50 points, horizontally, for a cool 1000, or diagonally for a whopping 5000, and this is important to remember when playing. Why? Well, to keep the gameplay feeling varied, stages have different criteria which you must meet in order to progress to the next. For instance, in one stage it might ask you to simply create a certain number of 'Klaxs', while in another it may ask you to attain a certain number of points, or survive a wave of 40 tiles.

In addition to making clever use of the various stacking options that are available, it's also possible to stack multiple tiles on your paddle too, and on the later, more fast-paced stages this becomes invaluable when more colours get added to the mix and it feels like you're effectively spinning plates.

Despite being little more than a glorified packaging simulator in many respects, the beauty of *Klax* comes from its strong art design, variety, and oh so very addictive gameplay. ✱




CREDITS
0
RIGHT PLAYER JOIN IN ANYTIME
WAVE
6

RETRORATED



>> After a lot of hype and a fair amount of controversy we finally get to play the latest SimCity. We've also sunk time into Luigi's excellent new 3DS adventure and become insanely addicted to Jeff Minter's GoatUp2

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
SimCity
I've found myself pouring endless hours into Maxis' game, when I can stop my daughter from hogging it…



STUART
Luigi's Mansion 2
It's been a long wait, but it was certainly worth it, thanks to some delightful visuals and truly satisfying gameplay.



DAVID
Luigi's Mansion 2
Everyone who enjoyed the original GameCube game will love this. The 3D effects are also really impressive.



» [PC] As more Sims live in your city you'll be able to level up your City Hall. This is turn allows you to access better facilities which attract more Sims.

SimCity

MAXIS' CITY BUILDER DELIGHTS AND FRUSTRATES IN EQUAL MEASURES

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PC
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £44.99 (£64.99 DELUXE EDITION)
- » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** MAXIS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SIM CITY (SNES)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
CIVILIZATION V (PC)





***SimCity* is fun. There, we've said it. Yes, it had some terrible issues at launch (see box out) and yes it has numerous bugs that can make some aspects of your city building bewildering or completely pointless, but there's no denying that it remains highly enjoyable to play.**

Part of this is due to the sheer accessibility that *SimCity* offers over similar games, and indeed past games in the series. Yes, fans of previous titles will see it as a little too dumbed down, but the grid-based system that has been employed makes *SimCity* highly approachable, even if you're not a fan of the genre. Simple instructions, straightforward missions and easy-to-follow rule sets make *SimCity* incredibly easy to access, while the impressive visuals allow your city to come to life in enchanting ways. Watching a truck move a new resident to the area will never get tiresome, and things only get better as your city expands and new residents and buildings appear.

One of the most frustrating aspects of this new *SimCity* is the actual size of your playing area, which is greatly reduced compared to past versions of the game. While some will never get entirely used to this smaller area (which we sincerely hope isn't going to be expanded with DLC in the future) we did slowly start to warm to it, mainly because it really chooses you to think about how you plan out your city.

SimCity is all about the long game, so haphazardly plopping down residential zones, power plants and other important buildings as you see fit is only going to end in tears. There's a huge amount of forward planning needed, but also a lot of balancing, as the smaller city zones mean you don't have as much freedom as in previous games. Every action in the game has an appropriate reaction, so you're always going to have to try and find the best middle ground in order to expand. This becomes more obvious as you gain more residents, and it's here where the game starts to lose some of its polish.

There's a big focus on individual residents in *SimCity*, meaning you can follow virtually any citizen as they go about their mundane, everyday lives. It's a nice touch, but we'd have preferred a more expansive playing area, particularly as most of the time following them is pretty boring. We'd also have preferred slicker path finding than

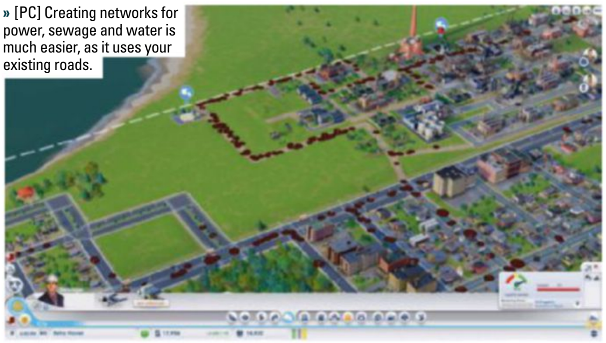


» [PC] Regions are a new aspect of *SimCity*, allowing you to visit your friends' cities. Sadly it's part of the requirement for the game's annoying always-online play.



Launch day blues

Due to EA's insistence on ensuring the game is always online, it struggled with server demands and many gamers couldn't even play the game. Problems continued with EA cutting back key features to help with server demand, eventually relenting and issuing several apologies on its website. Early adopters were given an additional free game by way of an apology. We delayed our review as we couldn't get on the servers the first weekend, but our sister website NowGamer.com had no such problems, amassing hours of play. EA's insistence on DRM had ruined the game for a great many people at launch. Our advice is to steer clear of games that use similar mechanics until the teething issues are sorted out.



» [PC] Creating networks for power, sewage and water is much easier, as it uses your existing roads.



» [PC] Like previous *SimCity* games you'll often encounter hazards. Here we've been ravaged by an impromptu zombie attack.

what's on offer here. The AI on offer is far from perfect, with vehicles and pedestrians forming in unnatural clumps or simply ignoring more convenient avenues of transportation, which means the efficiency of your city often drops through no fault of your own.

We say city, but we really mean cities, because the tiny size of your main city will soon cause you to look at the other available cities in *SimCity*'s eight different regions. Other cities can be either controlled by yourself or friends and resources like power can be shared or traded between them. It's an interesting addition to the core game, but it can present its own problems, particularly when it's all too easy to become dependent on another player. Despite getting used to the smaller size of the cities, we'd have preferred a single sprawling metropolis to look after, as it can get tedious having to keep several cities on the go at once.

New mechanics like specialisation – allowing you to base your city around a specific theme like gambling – let you to give your city more personality, but there's no escaping the overall cramped confines you're constantly a slave to, even if you do slowly start to turn them to your advantage. This was never an issue in past games, so it's disappointing to see it creep in here.

The weird thing however, is that even though *SimCity* has problems, it's still horrifically addictive, causing you to waste huge amounts of time as you watch your city bustle about beneath you. Seeing citizens respond favourably to the placement of a new park, or watching your police force take down nefarious burglars is decidedly thrilling, offering a sense of power that only the best 'god' games are able to achieve. Then of course there are the humorous disasters that can range from zombie outbreaks to UFO sightings, which further add to *SimCity*'s charm.

And it is a charming game, even if there is a lot of ugliness lying under its beautifully glossy surface. Residents routinely request your help with sidequests, the extensive sandbox mode allows you to understand how the game's mechanics work before you let them loose for real, while the online interaction with friends and other players adds a further layer to what is an already deep strategy game.

Ultimately though, it's the sheer depth of *SimCity* that constantly pulls you in and even though you'll be irked by its many idiosyncrasies, you'll still find yourself blinking bleary-eyed at your monitor screen as yet another evening gets lost to Maxis' addictive yet flawed game.



» [PC] There's something strangely calming about watching your city at night. Watch out for UFO and zombie attacks though.



OPINION

SimCity isn't perfect, but it is fun to play. There are certainly AI issues at the moment that can impact on the effectiveness of your city, but there are also plenty of new ideas as well. I'm also a fan of its accessibility, which makes it far easier than past games in the series.

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

Currently something of a rough diamond, many of *SimCity*'s issues will hopefully be ironed out in time. It's a strong strategy game, but not quite as strong or enjoyable as its impressive predecessors.

\>> Score **66%**

A Brief History Of SimCity



SimCity 1989

Will Wright's seminal city-builder was a tremendous success upon its release, inspiring developers like Sid Meier and spawning countless sequels. Over the years it has been ported to over 25 systems, from the ZX Spectrum to GBA and iOS.



SimCity 2000 1994

The sequel was a huge improvement over the original introducing new mechanics, exciting new scenarios and all manner of new buildings and facilities to build. It also boasts a stylish new visual look, which you can see on our front cover.



SimCity 4 2003

The last major *SimCity* game focused on terraforming, meaning creating your region was just as important as the building of your eventual city. It's also noted for the Building Architect Tool that allows third-party content to be added to the game.



SimCity Societies 2007

With Maxis focusing on *Spore*, development duties fell to *Caesar IV* creator Tilted Mill Entertainment. The end result is an interesting addition, which eschews complex mechanics in favour of accessibility and a focus on society values.



SimCity Social 2012

This Facebook game is the direct result of collaboration between Maxis and social game giants Playfish and plays very similarly to Zynga's *CityVille*. It's an interesting evolution of the series, but doesn't feel like a proper *SimCity* game.

Luigi's Mansion 2

MARVELLOUS MANSIONS



INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** NEXT LEVEL GAMES
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

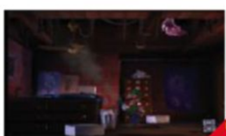
» *Luigi's Mansion* was a GameCube launch title, and was originally titled *Mario's Mansion* and starred the more famous of the Mario siblings. Starting life as a tech demo for the console before being expanded into a full game, it was originally planned to utilise 3D technology inside state-of-the-art televisions of the time but the feature was dropped. The 3DS finally realises that plan to make *Luigi's Mansion* 3D compatible.

✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Luigi's Mansion

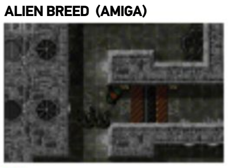
>> **Nintendo used the original *Luigi's Mansion* to test the 3D capabilities of the 3DS.**

>> **Next Level Games were also behind the Wii games *Mario Strikers* and *Punch-Out!!***



✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
ALIEN BREED (AMIGA)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
RESIDENT EVIL 6 (PS3/XBOX 360)



3DS

***Luigi's Mansion* was an underrated gem that bravely put Luigi centre stage and eschewed the series' Mari-based roots, and while this sequel sticks close to the gameplay of the original it has far more going on in terms of variety, puzzles and how you trap your ethereal enemies. Basically it breathes new life into the series.**

Luigi finds himself reunited with Professor Elvin Gadd and this time bullied into getting transported to five haunted mansions to retrieve five pieces of the mysterious Dark Moon artefact, the theft of which has caused all manner of unwanted paranormal activity to occur. After collecting a Poltergust vacuum from inside the first mansion, Luigi's ghost busting mission begins, and using a map and Gadd's pointers you must help him work his way through the puzzle strewn routes to each Dark Moon piece. Puzzles are solved through a combination of stunning and sucking up ghosts, hitting switches, vacuuming up objects (such as curtains and carpets) to expose things, or picking up and moving objects – for example, Luigi might have to pick up some wood, dangle it over a fire to set it alight and then use it to melt away some ice encasing a door key. And to make things trickier, some objects of interest and enemies are hidden from view and only become visible when Luigi shines a special torch attachment over them.

With some stunning animation, impressive 3D effects, effective humour, and clever level design, this is a superb sequel. And with each section taking a few hours to complete, plus a secondary optional goal in the form of precious gemstones to find as well as bonus rooms, Nintendo has addressed those criticisms about the original's short length. Our biggest gripe, and it's a minor one, is the fact you have to complete each stage in one sitting. Save from resorting to sleep mode and keeping a beady eye on the battery light, there appears to be no way of stopping the game mid-stage, which is incredibly annoying if you're 80 per cent through one, get stuck and want to come back to it later. That said, we finished it without this being too much of an issue, it's just something we'd like to see not appear in a sequel. Building on the potential of *Luigi's Mansion* in fine form then, *Luigi's Mansion 2* is an essential 3DS purchase.



» [3DS] The game has a nice array of puzzles, combining a mixture of logic and thorough exploration.



» [3DS] Hidden around the mansion is various cash and loot, earning you XP to level up your Poltergust vacuum.





In a nutshell

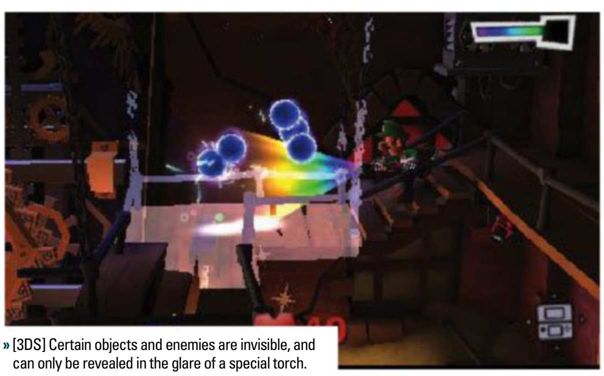
Packed with fun, variety and imagination, if you liked the original then you'll love this sequel and should hoover up a copy right away!

>> **Score 90%**

OPINION



I was a huge fan of the original GameCube game, so I'm really pleased to see this finally arrive on 3DS. It's completely delightful as well, building on the mechanics found in the original game, whilst adding plenty of new ideas. Full of charm and character and filled with imaginative boss fights, it's a superb addition to your 3DS library.



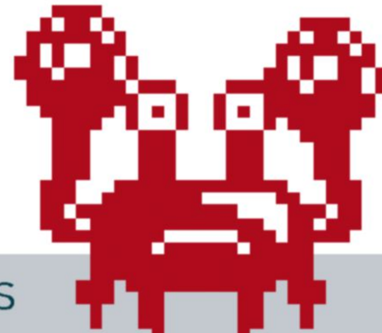
» [3DS] Certain objects and enemies are invisible, and can only be revealed in the glare of a special torch.



» [3DS] Some ghosts are sneaky and will wear sunglasses and facemasks to protect themselves from the flash.

RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download



DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH



INFORMATION
» **System:** iOS
» **Buy it for:** £2.49
» **Buy it from:** AppStore
» **Score:** 91%

GoatUp 2

Jeff Minter has gone from strength-to-strength since moving to iOS, and this latest offering is one of his best games yet. Within moments of playing this classy sequel you know it's quintessential Minter. Farting sheep, beautiful 8-bit sprites and sound effects that have been sampled or borrowed from the likes of *Gauntlet*, *Bullseye* and *Jet Set Willy* all combine to deliver the sort of aesthetic overload that has become Jeff's bread and butter over the past thirty years.

It plays beautifully as well, with precise touch controls that give you an exceptional amount of control over your errant goat. It really comes alive if you're lucky enough to have access to iCade, but there's no denying the Jeff has done a great job with the base tools he's been given.

For all its crazy sound effects and tight controls, it's the gameplay that really makes Jeff's sequel come alive. Rather than simply sticking with the formulae of the original game, *GoatUp 2* is a free roaming platformer that has you racing around the levels and collecting a set amount of items before you're able to leave.

Your goat's vitality is determined by a constantly depleting hunger bar so you'll find yourself constantly running around the levels, eating up any patches of grass you find to restore it. Certain collectables will trail behind you and allow you to fart to gain more height (effectively acting as a double jump), which not only lets you reach inaccessible areas, but also acts as a way of killing enemies.

Longevity is also assured with the core game featuring 80 levels paced across four stages. Add in tight time limits and a level editor and *GoatUp 2* offers a huge amount of replay value for its paltry price point. An excellent little platformer that combines finely honed gameplay with Eighties nostalgia.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



Legend Of The River King

» **System:** Game Boy Color
» **Buy it for:** £4.49
» **Buy it from:** Virtual Console (3DS)
» **Score:** 82%
» *Legend Of The River King* is a fantastic little game that combines RPG mechanics with fishing games. It seems an odd concept at first, but it works exceptionally well, mainly because the world is full of interesting characters to interact with and that there are 40 different types of fish to catch. It's not a particularly long game, considering its RPG elements, but the visuals and gameplay will hook you in regardless.



Darkstalkers Resurrection

» **System:** PS3 (tested), Xbox 360
» **Buy it for:** £11.99 (1200 Points)
» **Buy it from:** PSN, Xbox Live Arcade
» **Score:** 86%
» After impressing us with its port of *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*, Iron Galaxy Studios returns with another fantastic brawler. *Darkstalkers Resurrection* consists of both *Darkstalkers* sequels and each is truly superb, delivering a multiple of handy tweaks and stable online play. The games themselves still play well, and while they lack the depth of more recent fighters they still prove great fun.



Omikron: The Nomad Soul

» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** $9.99 (£6.49)
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** 65%
» As David Cage continues to attain human perfection in videogame form, it's interesting to return to one of his earliest games. *The Nomad Soul* is an interesting blend of ideas that borrows from popular genres. The end result is something of an oddity, and while the story and music (courtesy of David Bowie) is of a very high standard, many will be frustrated with its clunky controls and awkward gameplay mechanics.



Virtua Striker

» **System:** Arcade
» **Buy it for:** 800 Points
» **Buy it from:** Xbox Live Arcade
» **Score:** 70%
» It certainly looks a little dated nowadays, but Sega's football game is still great fun to play. Fast paced and with the ability to pull off plenty of fancy shots, it's a solid conversion of an aging arcade game that's enhanced with solid online play. The computer AI remains a little too challenging at time, but it's the multiplayer where the game has always shined and this excellent conversion is no different.

Life Of Pixel

» **System:** PS Vita » **Buy it for:** £1.59
» **Buy it from:** PSN » **Score:** 82%

Fans of 8-bit computers and consoles are going to love the concept of *Life Of Pixel*, as it's essentially a love letter to all manner of classic machines. Taking control of the titular pixel you must navigate a number of fiendishly designed levels that range from simple single-screen puzzles, to bigger multi-screened sprawling areas, picking up a set number of gems as you go. The beauty of Super Icon's game is that the levels themselves are based around eight classic computers and consoles, ranging from the ZX81 to Nintendo's NES, with all the little graphical quirks and sound effects that you'd expect to find on those systems. The gameplay isn't quite up to the same inventive standards as the aesthetics, being essentially a take on *Super Meat Boy*, but the controls are responsive, and the level design is of a high quality. There's a few difficulty spikes on some of the later stages that can prove a little frustrating to pass, but this is otherwise a highly entertaining platformer. We'd love to see a 16-bit sequel.



>> The scene's latest news and reviews

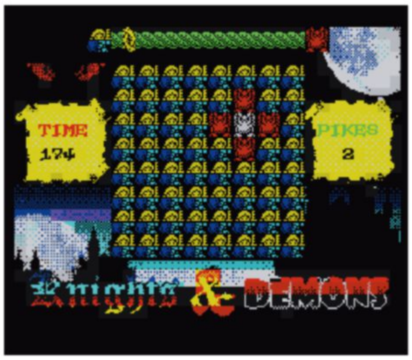


We've seen a few ported games this issue and one thing that readers might not realise is that, although releases like Knights And Demons or Asteroids Emulator are converted between machines with the same processor, that's only a part of the story; the actual process of getting one of these projects working between platforms like that still takes quite a bit of work and dedication to achieve

KNIGHTS AND DEMONS

SAVING THE WORLD BY SWAPPING SOME TILES!





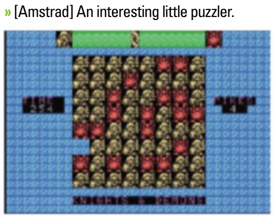


» [Amstrad CPC] So why on Earth should I moan?



FORMAT: SPECTRUM, CPC AND MSX
DEVELOPER: KABUTO FACTORY
LINK: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/KNIGHTS-DEMONS
RELEASE: 2013
PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD, VARIOUS PRICES ON CASSETTE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK


» [Amstrad] An interesting little puzzler.

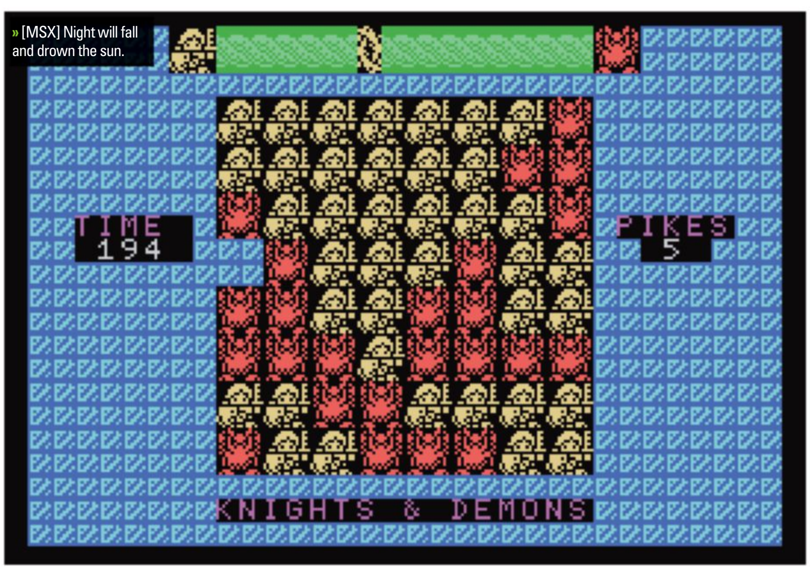

» [MSX] Some many demons, so little time…

Bakelor is the Lord of War and King of the Single Knights – presumably there's someone else in charge of the knights currently in a relationship – who, having bravely led his warriors into the final battle with the forces of the Lord of the Darkness, has suffered an embarrassing mishap on his way to the loo which has put him completely out of the picture just as things begin to get busy. Step forward the player as Bakelor's protégé to take command of the troops for the final battles which will decide the fate of everybody in the world.

Despite the swords and sorcery plotline, *Knights And Demons* is actually a puzzle game; the player is presented with an eight by eight tile playfield with each space initially populated either by a knight or a demon and, as the understudy to the Lord of War, the player must use their cursor to toggle the state of these tiles until all are the same. But it isn't as simple as that might sound because clicking on a tile changes the state of four surrounding it as well so clearing the board involves lots of advance planning and, on those occasions when a single, frustrating tile has been left occupied, one of the limited stock of magical pike staffs which will alter its state without any effect on its neighbours.



There's also a reasonably generous time limit that if it should expire will automatically end the game and, while the player can complete each battle with *either side* taking over the entire field, the state of the war is directly influenced by each of these skirmishes and too many ticks in the demons' win column will hand them the overall victory.



» [MSX] Night will fall and drown the sun.

Knights And Demons was developed and released for the Amstrad CPC, Sinclair Spectrum and MSX machines and, although the game itself remains pretty much the same, each version sports its own take on the cosmetic details like in-game graphics and sound. On that front, the Spectrum is the least appealing with reasonable playfield graphics surrounded by some rough looking converted images where the MSX and Amstrad CPC have a bland but more visually attractive repeated tile to fill the space. Unusually for a conversion from the Spectrum, the Amstrad's graphics are in the chunkier mode 0, although they don't fully take advantage of that mode's sixteen possible colours.

Knights And Demons is a reasonable puzzle game with a small twist that can be enjoyed on three different 8-bits. On the gameplay front, all three versions play similarly enough that the only thing making us lean towards a particular version is the slightly faster overall pace of the Spectrum iteration and its selection cursor that sensibly doesn't obscure the tile it's highlighting – if that latter feature in particular which saves a lot of moving the cursor to see what the current tile is was present in the other versions, we'd probably have favoured the Amstrad for its in-game music.

84%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

BOMB ON PIXEL CITY

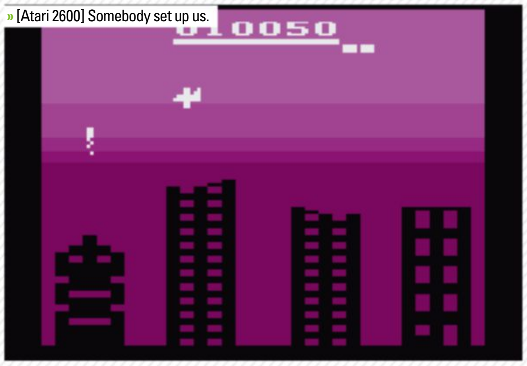
» **FORMAT:** ATARI 2600 » **DEVELOPER:** GAMOPAT STUDIOS
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/BOMB-PIXEL-2600 » **PRICE:** FREE

Based on the iOS game of the same name, *Bomb On Pixel City* was originally inspired by the Vic-20 game *Blitz*. That doesn't mean it's a straight clone however because, along with skyscrapers that need to be bombed to oblivion, the developers have added extra hazards such as turrets that fire upwards when the player is nearby. There's also a bird flapping around on some stages that will down the plane if the two make contact. They're little touches to be sure, but they do add a certain amount of appeal.

More control over the plane's movement has been added as well; fire drops bombs on the city below as expected but, rather than merely moving across the screen at a fixed speed, pushing left or right on the joystick will speed up or slow down the plane which allows for more precise aiming of bombs or a burst of speed to avoid hazards with a little practise. These changes greatly add to the overall gameplay of *Bomb On Pixel City* and the result feels like something Atari might have released in the early Eighties.

82%

» [Atari 2600] Somebody set up us.









» [Windows] A ringing in my ears.

THE INHERITANCE

» **FORMAT:** PC » **DEVELOPER:** SCOTT ADAMS
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.SCOTTADAMSGRANDADVENTURES.COM/ » **PRICE:** $19.95

Scott Adams, who pioneered the genre with *Adventureland* and *Pirate's Cove*, is back with *The Inheritance* and in many ways, it's classic Adams. There's a mysterious mansion to explore, fiendish puzzles, and many knowing nods to his back catalogue. Things have evolved since the Seventies as now you can use full sentences rather than two word commands and the entire text of the Bible is included to provide divine inspiration when you inevitably get stuck. Atheists, fear not – the game also has a comprehensive help system. There are occasional frustrations as you struggle to find the right phrase but mainly it's a glorious reminder of how a master can conjure up vivid locations with a few well-chosen words and have you mulling over in-game problems even when you're far from your keyboard.

90%

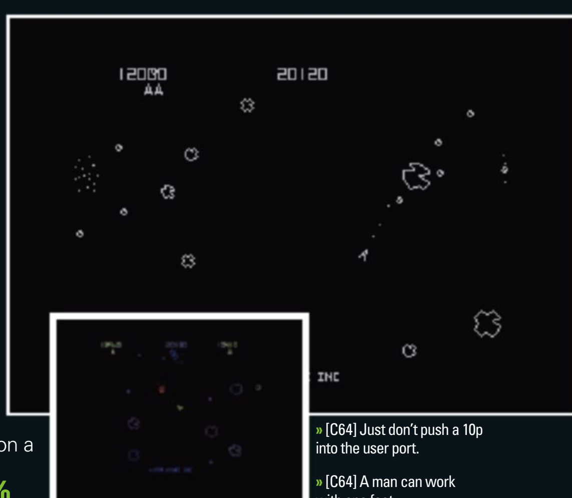
ASTEROIDS EMULATOR

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** NORBERT KEHRER
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/ASTEROIDS-EMU-C64
» **PRICE:** FREE

A few issues ago we took a look at the Atari 8-bit version of *Asteroids Emulator*. Now its developer Norbert Kehrer has ported the code to work with a C64 as well and, since it's running the original game and emulating the vector graphics hardware, this is the most accurate conversion of *Asteroids* seen on the breadbin bar none – it even sports an option to emulate the coloured overlay.

The C64 has a slower CPU than the Atari 8-bit so the speed issues we mentioned previously are more prominent and the overall score we've given reflects that. But processor accelerators are a little more common on the Commodore machine so, along with the SuperCPU-compatible version already released at the time of writing, we've tried *Asteroids Emulator* on a Turbo Chameleon at 2MHz and, apart from the sound not working correctly right now, it runs at a very reasonable speed.

68%

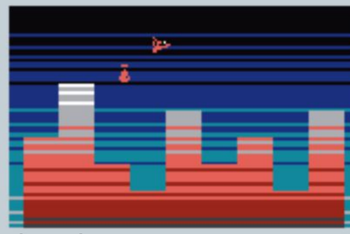


» [C64] Just don't push a 10p into the user port.

» [C64] A man can work with one foot.

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Videopac] Can these things really land safely?

>> BOMBS AWAY, OLD CHAP

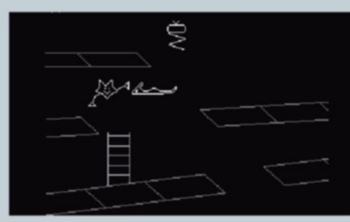
Air Assault is the latest Philips Videopac and Magnavox Odyssey 2 release from Revival Studios, whose previous title for these machines was *Mage: The Enchanted Crystals*. This time the action is more violent with a B-2 Stealth Bomber slowly descending towards a city which it must demolish in order to make a safe landing. www.kikstart.eu/air-assault-videopac



» [Oric] With the quickness talk with the witnesses.

>> FEELING ALL AT SEA

The Oric community have, as part of the 30th anniversary celebrations, been treated to a conversion of Cobra Soft's *Murder On The Atlantic*, a mystery story set within the sprawling locations aboard a liner from the Thirties. There are forty people aboard to question, lots of locations to visit and the documentation includes images of the mystery objects shipped with the commercially released versions of the game. www.kikstart.eu/murder-oric



» [C64] Oh no, Molly!

>> LITTLE BOXES ON THE HILLSIDE

As usual, over at RGCD things have been busy and there are a couple of new C64 cartridges available. An expanded version of 16K cartridge competition entry *Assembloids* is the first and a fast-paced reflex testing game, while the second contains two Vectrex conversions, *Minestorm* and *Spike*. www.kikstart.eu/assembloids-c64 and www.kikstart.eu/spike-minestorm-c64

HOMEBREW

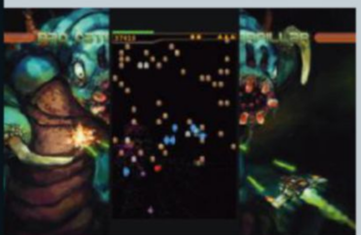
>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> GENTIAN, LUPINE AND TALL HOLLIHOCKS

Bad Caterpillar is a remake of *Centipede* which, for those who haven't played the Eighties coin-op or one of the many clones released during the 8-bit era, is a single screen action game where the titular arthropod makes its way down the screen and must be destroyed. From what we've seen during a quick test play, this XBLIG version is reasonably close to the original but adds other wildlife and shielding for the caterpillar's segments, dishing out extra weapons to keep things reasonably balanced. www.kikstart.eu/caterpillar-xblig



>> WORK YOUR JELLY

We've wasted some time playing *Jelly No Puzzle*, a Japanese puzzler with some worryingly cute overtones. The challenge is to group together all jelly cubes of the same colour on a screen but that'll require quite a lot of forward planning since they can only move left or right under player control or be pulled down by gravity. To pick up this tricky title, have a look behind www.kikstart.eu/jelly-puzzle-pc



FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Frantic 3**.

GOOD BULLET HELL SHOOT-'EM-UPS IN FLASH AREN'T PARTICULARLY COMMON AND, ALTHOUGH IT TWEAKS THE FORMULA WITH A SHOP AND A HEALTH BAR, **FRANTIC 3** DOES TICK ALL THE BOXES AS REGARDS BULLET COUNT AND COLLISIONS. THERE ARE ALSO FIVE PLAYER SHIPS, ENEMIES GALORE AND COINS FOR PURCHASING UPGRADES. WWW.KIKSTART.EU/FRANTIC-3-FLASH

MORE GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .

BOMBERMINE

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.BOMBERMINE.COM

***Bombermine* is a** web-based clone of the classic *Bomberman,* only it supports up to a thousand simultaneous players! To accommodate this, the playfield has been expanded and scrolling bolted in, but the objective remains the same; drop time bombs into the arena to blow up other players and blocks while avoiding any explosions yourself. Destroying some background blocks reveals power-ups and, along with the traditional ones increasing bomb yield and movement speed, there are some extras that change the player into Kenny from *South Park* or Nyan Cat, affecting how they move and drop bombs, making the already enjoyable *Bomberman* even more fun.

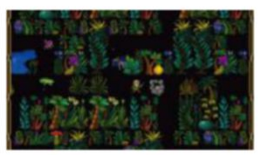




SABRE WULF

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/SABRE-WULF-PC

The ancient story of the legendary explorer Sabre Man dates back as far as the Eighties and this is a retelling of one of his adventures; Sabre has fallen into a previously undiscovered valley and, after deciding a climb out isn't viable, must find the four parts of the magical amulet that will open a portal to freedom. This is a nicely presented remake, but the change from flip screen to scrolling does take away some of the claustrophobic atmosphere of the original and there are a few issues with enemies accidentally moving through the landscape. Hardcore fans will most find these changes a little annoying, but more casual players and those who didn't play the 8-bit versions should find it enjoyable.







CHRONOBLAST

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/CHRONOBLAST-XBLIG

It's time to save the universe again, this time taking one of four selectable pilots to into battle. *Chronoblast* is a bullet hell game designed by a fan of the genre and inspired by titles like *DoDonPachi*, so there are a *ridiculous* numbers of projectiles in play at one time and a teensy collision area at the heart of the ship which must be kept away from them.



Each pilot has her own craft with a distinct configuration and all have two firing modes; the primary weapon slings out bullets with some offering a wider field of fire than others, while the secondary is an impressive-looking beam weapon which also slows down ship movement for those tight bullet-dodging parts of the game. There are also three settings for each character, "autobomb" – which means smart bombs will, as long as they're in stock, be triggered automatically on otherwise fatal impacts to save the player – "normal" and "hell" for the more advanced players.

Shoot-'em-up novices will find the almost relentless hail of bullets overwhelming at least to begin with and anyone not familiar with bullet hell should definitely try the demo first, but *Chronoblast* is a solid game that should sit well with any reasonably experienced fan of the genre and it even claims to be the first XBLIG title to support a rotated display for that authentic arcade experience. A decent addition to the genre that's well worth a download.



HOMEBREW HEROES

WE DO LOVE A GOOD GAME OF ASTEROIDS, SO NORBERT KEHRER'S ASTEROIDS EMULATOR FOR THE ATARI 8-BITS AND THEN C64 REALLY CAUGHT OUR ATTENTION. IT GAVE US A GREAT EXCUSE TO ASK A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT'S INVOLVED TO EMULATE VECTOR-BASED GAMES ON A EIGHTIES COMPUTER



Q&A

What was it about *Asteroids* that made it ripe for emulating?
The project started for me in 2001, when I disassembled and commented the complete program ROM of the *Asteroids* arcade machine. Already back then I had the intention to run the *Asteroids* code on different platforms, and I made the first attempts to move it to the C64. It was not so easy, so I moved on to other projects, and it took me more than ten years to resume work on the program. In 2012 the ABBUC Software Competition was the stimulus to use my prior work and try an *Asteroids* emulator on the Atari 8-bit machines. The Atari machine was faster than the C64 and easier to program for this type of game, so it worked out. The port to the C64 later was easier, using techniques already implemented on the Atari 800XL.

How much tweaking of the original ROM code was needed?
At the beginning, there were almost no patches to the original ROM. The emulator just interpreted the contents of the game's RAM areas and drew the corresponding graphics. The need for higher speed later called for more and more patches and hooks to jump into specific own-written subroutines.

The emulator on the Atari required not so many speed optimisations and therefore also less ROM changes than the C64 version. The C64 additionally has the problem, that addresses $0000 and $0001 are processor ports reserved for memory management, but the *Asteroids* code uses these addresses as normal work RAM.

And how difficult was getting the vector graphics running at a playable speed?
Right from the beginning it was clear for me, that the traditional emulation approach to simulate the arcade machine's vector generator hardware at a low level, and to draw all these lines separately, would be too slow. So I went for high-level emulation, where complete objects are drawn at once instead of the individual lines. This is much faster, but also more difficult, as it requires a good knowledge of the emulated program itself. Nonetheless, on the Atari 800XL I was really surprised at the beginning that it was relatively easy to get an acceptable speed with this method.

Would you say it was harder doing a direct port like this than a more conventional conversion?
I think a conventional conversion of *Asteroids* would be easier. The disassembly of the original *Asteroids* code took me certainly much longer, than it would take to code the game logic of an *Asteroids*-like game from scratch. But this would then be just another clone, and not the original.

Are there any stand out moments from the development of the *Asteroids Emulator*?
It was great to see for the first time the rocks fly around in the Atari version of the emulator. There was still a lot of flickering, but I recognised in that moment, that the target can be reached.

And finally, have you any projects planned that our readers will want to hear about?
I want to work further with *Asteroids* and I hope to be able to make "perfect" conversions for not only the Vectrex but also for Z80-based home computers like the ZX Spectrum and the MSX or Amstrad computers.

Based on my disassembled source code I plan to implement the original game algorithms in 6809 and Z80 assembler in order to have the real *Asteroids* game play also on non-6502 machines.



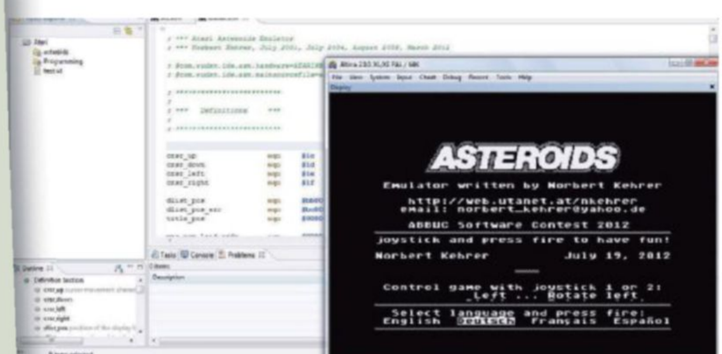
» [C64] Now available in colour.



» [Atari 8-bit] Atari's game on Atari's computer.



» [Atari 8-bit] You need to be a little boulder!



» [Atari 8-bit] Some tools behind *Asteroids Emulator*.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER

MORE LAST GEN PLEASE

Dear Retro Gamer,
I just wanted to say how delighted I was to read your article about the PlayStation 2 in your last issue (114).

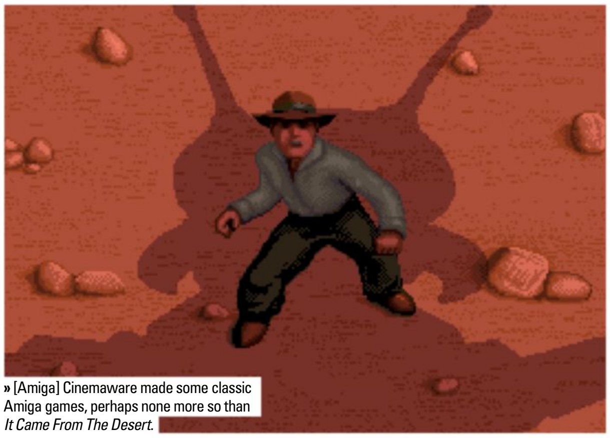
Sony's second console had a massive impact on the gaming industry and I genuinely feel it has left behind a lasting legacy of genuinely fantastic standalone games and franchises. I would have loved to have seen more pages devoted to this fantastic console, but the six you'd given it was more than adequate.

This got me thinking however about the general lack of coverage of newer old consoles in your magazine. There is little monthly coverage on PS2, GameCube or Xbox games, despite the fact that all of these consoles are over a decade old now. I'm fully aware that some readers don't feel these machines deserve a place in the magazine, but they forget how long 10-13 years is. When **Retro Gamer** launched in 2004 no one murmured if the Saturn or Game Boy Advance were covered, despite being out for the same amount of time that the last generation has. It's funny how much people forget…
Best regards,
John Catterall

First off John, we're glad you enjoyed the PS2 article. We'll still be steering away from a big focus on the last gen machines, as we've still plenty of old ground to cover, but it's becoming increasingly obvious that there are a lot of readers interested in it.



» [PS2] Many readers feel that we don't do enough last gen coverage. Do you? Let us know on the forum.



» [Amiga] Cinemaware made some classic Amiga games, perhaps none more so than *It Came From The Desert*.

AMIGA GAMES YOU FORGOT

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I was pleased to see the latest issue of **Retro Gamer** featured a Collector's Guide to one of my favourite home computers – Commodore's Amiga 500. However I was a bit surprised at some of the games that didn't get included among the Amiga Games You Need To Own, including many of the great adventure games such as *Fate Of Atlantis*, *Beneath A Steel Sky* and *Cruise For A Corpse*, just to mention a few. And *Chaos Engine 2* better than the first *Chaos Engine*. Really? And not a single mention of a Cinemaware title in among the Top Games To Play! What about classic games such as *Wings* and *It Came From The Desert*? These barely get a mention anywhere in the guide. How about running a feature on the Cinemaware Corporation sometime soon?
Darren Curzon

Hi Darren, we received a few letters and emails about the game recommendations within the Amiga article, and accept that many classic games didn't feature. The problem was there were just too many to choose from, so compiling the list wasn't easy. We hope it didn't spoil your enjoyment of the article too much though. You will be pleased to know that we are planning a Cinemaware article in the near future. So look out for that.

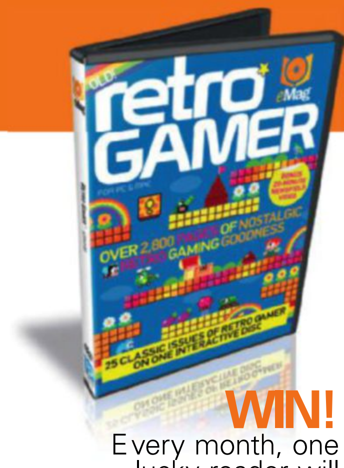
DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Classy Darran

Liquid was spurting from the team's noses and other lofty body fissures as Darran regaled an amusing tale about how when visiting a primary school to deliver a talk about journalism. During a Q&A session at the end Darran's only taker was a child who asked him if he knew that his fly was open. Hilarious stuff. Well, we thought so – apparently so did the class.

EURO SUMO GAME SHOCKER!

Hello **Retro Gamer** / Darran
Just been reading issue 114 and reading the import only article, I think I may have found a sumo wrestling game that was released in Europe that you were looking for. *Sumo Wrestlers* for the Commodore 64 released in 1985 by Hesware.



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

» [C64] Eagled-eyed reader Tom Harvey found a Euro Sumo game. It looks amazing…for a Sumo C64 game.



Do you have any bits of random office tat still? Anyways, keep up the good work.
Regards
Tom Harvey

Tom, we always have bits of random office tat lying around. If you email us your address you can have a dustpan full. Well done for rising to the challenge and opening our eyes. Right, we're off to see how it plays.

PLEASE CHAMPION CHAMP MAN

Dear **RG**,
I have been a subscriber to your magazine for years and never felt the need to write to you before. However, your omission of one of the Amiga 500's greatest games has annoyed me. This game was the reason I and many of my mates nagged their parents

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for the great Amiga. After spending hours in my friends' house with seven lads gathered around a TV watching the lucky owner deploy his 3-5-2 with holding midfielder, the only thing important in my life at that point was owning this game. It was one of the only games that kids went out and bought the original boxed version of (often copied versions would crash after 29 mins of the 30 min load time!). So please can you do a feature on *Champ Manager*?

Thanks,

Lee

(P.S. 4-4-2 with attacking midfielder was the best formation.)

A look back at the series is a great shout, sounds like a great idea to us. And as Sports Interactive is still going strong, we don't suppose getting insight into the history of the series would be too difficult. We'll get on it!



THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY. . .

This issue's covers that nearly happened







DARRAN

Not sure if you all know this but I do like to play the occasional shoot-'em-up, so for this reason I had a soft spot for this particular cover. The main image is taken from *1942*, a Capcom classic. We toyed with the idea of having the main cover line written in bullet holes, but it just didn't look as good as we envisaged.



STUART

At one point we were going down the movie poster look using the artwork from the game *The Infernal Machine* – but this is the one that got furthest through the process. It depicts the iconic boulder chase scene rendered in lovely 16-bit pixels. It was too dark, we decided, and the pixels didn't look great blown up.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite adventure game?

Kleinemaus
Starcross (Infocom) on A8, I saw this flying saucer box in a computer shop, I thought 'Wow what great packing'. Playing the game was reading like an adventure book, a fascinating experience. After *Starcross* I was hooked and I enjoyed the excellent games from Infocom on A8 and C64. Best ever.

Hiro
Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders is the first mouse-driven adventure I played and one of the first games I loaded on my Amiga, and deserves the top spot. Brilliant puzzles, a lot of locations, great humour. Stellar game.

ncf1
Oh boy. Of the countless adventures I've played and beaten, it boils down to two: *Monkey Island 2* and *The Dark Eye*. I will lean towards the latter in this instance simply because of its originality; there was nothing quite like it at the time and there still isn't. Amazing stop-motion puppetry visuals, dark and twisted storylines, a truly terrifying and absorbing original game, and if it didn't crash on newer systems I'd still be playing it today.

kiwimike
The ones I remember most fondly would be *Transylvania* and *Zork*, which would be the first ones I played on the school's Apple II.

PanzerGeneral
Level 9 were the kings for me, never really got the same feeling for Infocom and the others. *Return To Eden* and *Red Moon* were my favourites. Anybody who says they finished *Return To Eden* without the clue sheet was a lying b*stard.

Timothy Lumsden
Wizard And The Princess on Vic-20 doesn't count I suppose? Not a genre I played much, but *Mugsy* was fun on my friend's Speccy.

HalcyonDaze00
The magnificent *Monkey Island 1* & *2* are way ahead of everything else. Aside from these two legendary games I will always have a soft spot for *Urban Upstart* on the Speccy.

Mire Mare
In Infocom's *Suspended* you're in suspended animation, hardwired to a planetary system that's started to go wrong. It's frantic, fun and the only game I can think that I ever played where the main protagonist never moves! This is probably the first adventure I sought out and bought because of the storyline and the promise of glossy packing, maps and all. I wasn't disappointed and I still play *Suspended* on my C64. It's one of those games I'll always keep.

antsbull
Black Cauldron by Sierra Online – came out when I was 11 and had great Disney-influenced graphics, but more importantly was the first graphic adventure to include multiple routes through the game, multiple solutions to puzzles and a parser-less interface (it was released before *Maniac Mansion*). For an 11 year old, it was an awesome experience.

retro GAMER

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Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill,
Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.retrogamer.net
www.greatdigitalmags.com

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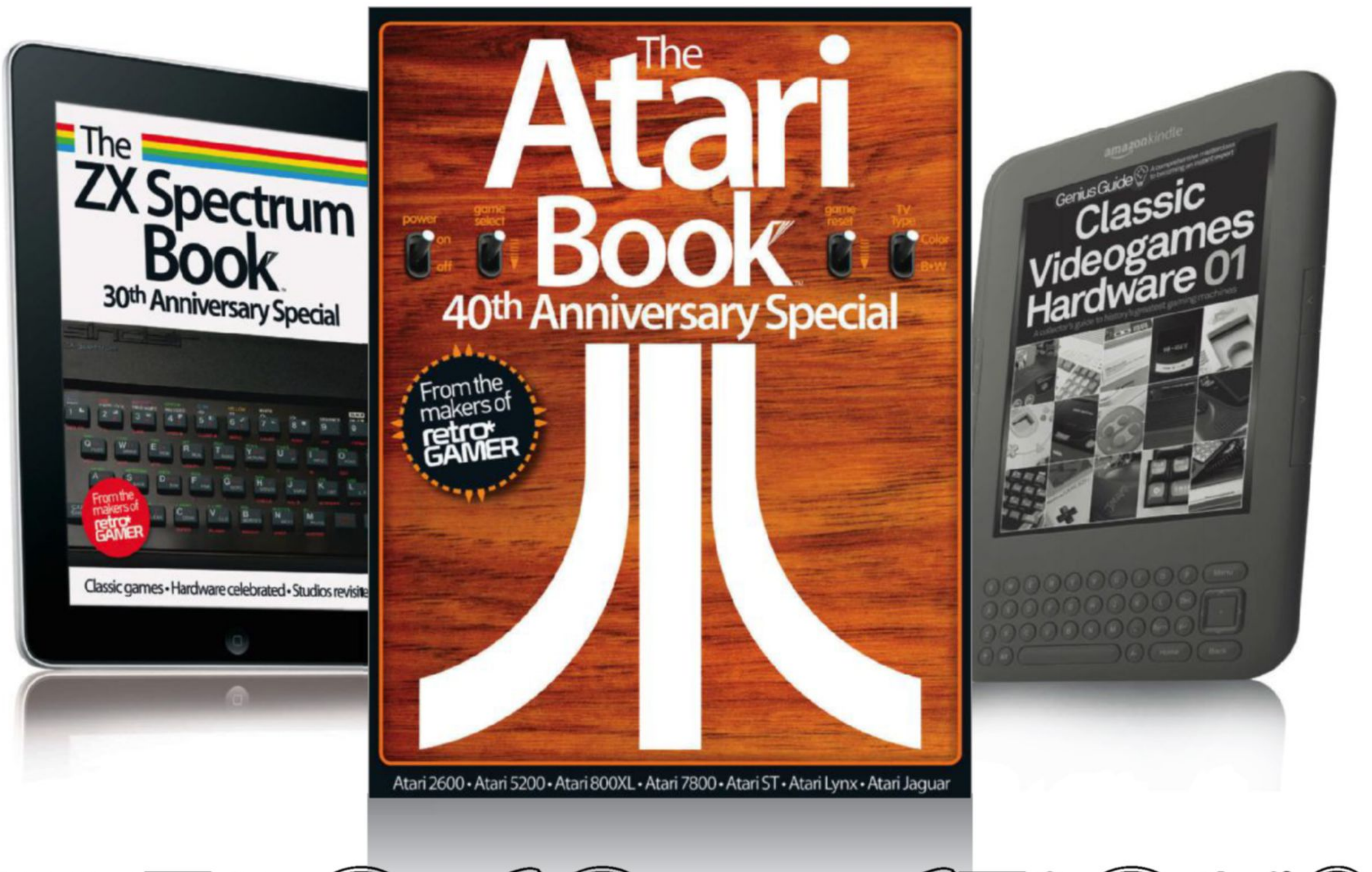
Printing & Distribution
Printed by Wyndeham Heron Ltd, Bentalls Complex, Colchester Road, Heybridge, Maldon, Essex, CM9 4NW
☎ 01621 877 777

Distributed in the UK & Eire by: Seymour Distribution, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT
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Distributed in Australia by: Gordon & Gotch, Equinox Centre, 18 Rodborough Road, Frenchs Forest, NSW 2086
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Distributed in the Rest of the World by: Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU
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LucasArts 1982-2013

As one of gaming's most significant software houses closes its doors we interview the developers who helped create some of its most important games

Also inside...



Starfox

■ Nintendo's Starfox is an impressive 20-years old. We celebrate by taking the original game for a spin



Crusader: No Remorse

■ We speak to developer Tony Zurovec who reveals the creation process behind his cult isometric PC blaster



Microsoft

■ Marty Goldberg looks at how Microsoft has dabbled in the games industry over the last 40 years



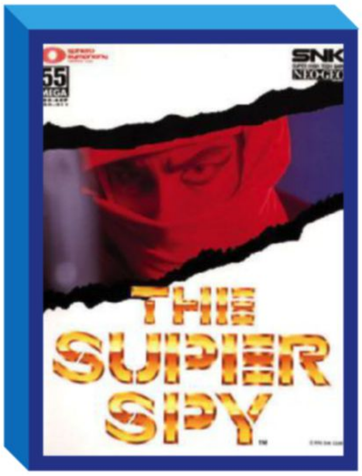
Doctor Who

■ As *Doctor Who* celebrates its 50th anniversary, we interview developers about every game in the series


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THE SUPER SPY

» This month it's SNK's bizarre FPM (first-person melee-er) The Super Spy, a quirky take on the Operation Wolf style action game which saw a better than average spy battling a bunch of anime terrorists inside a high rise building. Basically it's Spy Hard, it's just a shame SNK didn't cotton on to that puntastic title before the studio behind the terrible Leslie Nielson flick



01

» Reaching the top of the building, our spy comes face to face with the head of the terrorist organisation. A slightly unfair final fight – he's completely unarmed and we're using a knife. Oh well, he should have come better prepared.



02

» Defeated, the crime boss's parting shot is a strange threat: two or three of him will return to end the world. So does he have clones of himself somewhere, and is unsure how many of them there are, or is one of them just really lazy?



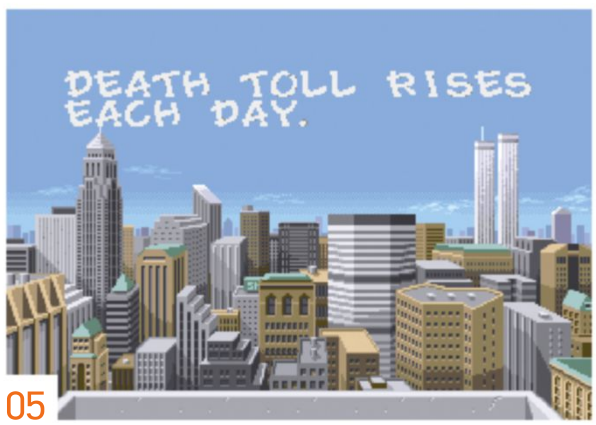
03

» With any immediate threat on his life brought to an end, you know have time to take in the frankly ridiculous, cluttered and self-indulgent HUD at the top of the screen. Geez, it looks like the *Lemmings* interface. Where's the explode button?



04

» Now if you're think you're getting a happy ending you can forget it. In what appears to be written in either clouds, by a sky writer or just in a terrible looking white font, the game explains that despite your efforts crime in the city has escalated.



05

» And just to really hit home, it twists the knife by saying that the death toll has risen. What a bleak ending. It makes the £400 spent on getting this on import for our new NeoGeo a bit gutting. Oh well, maybe *Magician Lord* will blow our minds.